

This electronic thesis or dissertation has been downloaded from the King's Research Portal at <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/>



**The body of Mary for the body of Christ  
Mary's maternal body as the poem of the father**

Petkovic, Jane Elizabeth

*Awarding institution:*  
King's College London

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

**END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT**



**Unless another licence is stated on the immediately following page** this work is licensed

under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

licence. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**THE BODY OF MARY FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST:  
MARY'S MATERNAL BODY AS POEM OF THE FATHER**

**Jane Petkovic**

**Submitted for the degree of**

**PhD in Theology & Religious Studies**

**King's College London**

## **Abstract**

John Paul II's theological anthropology, the Theology of the Body, seeks to articulate how the experience of being loved and of loving is foundational to a person's realising selfhood and meaning. John Paul's particular phenomenological focus is upon the love manifest in spousal relationships, including their sexual aspect. The task he sets himself is to articulate how spousal love and the human body mutually disclose each other and point to God. John Paul's hermeneutical task is to 're-read the language of the body in truth.' He begins by giving an extended interpretation of the Genesis creation narratives then applies the truths he finds they disclose (the person as made for love, as gifted, as sacramental sign) to a theological interpretation of the living and embodied person. This thesis considers John Paul's findings in the context of select contemporary theologians similarly interested in the body and in language. In line with some key suppositions of John Paul's methodology, metaphor (and poetics more generally) is held to be strongly present in the material world, including in acts of thinking, communicating, and interpreting. Following John Paul's phenomenological method, this thesis applies and extends it in two ways. Firstly, by looking at how literary texts (particular phenomena experienced in the mind and the body) and the body (as that through which one encounters all phenomena) can be read as mutually disclosive 'texts,' each of which is truth-bearing. To that end, a number of late twentieth-century poems whose subjects deal in some way with the maternal figure of Mary are read as linguistic embodiments of the human through which truths about what it is to be human are evoked. Secondly, this thesis reads the poetics of the maternal 'obstetric' body, through the lens of the Virgin Mary, thereby extending John Paul's anthropological findings to a new subject. Integrating the Virgin Mary within theological anthropology opens the way for a new, somatically-grounded Mariology.

## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .....	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	9
NOTES TO READER .....	10
(i) Concerning pronouns .....	10
(ii) Use of ellipses and italics .....	11
(iii) Reference books .....	11
Bible: .....	11
Vatican II documents: .....	11
Theology of the Body: .....	11
CHAPTER 1 THESIS BACKGROUND, CLAIMS, ISSUES .....	12
1.1 Defining <i>body</i> .....	12
1.2 John Paul II's intentions and methodology .....	13
1.3 Hermeneutics and 'reading the body in truth' .....	15
1.4 Core claims of this thesis .....	16
1.5 Establishing the claims .....	16
1.6 Issues to consider .....	17
1.6.1 Selection of poems .....	17
1.6.2 Neglected embodiment: Virgin Mary .....	17
1.6.3 Obstetric body: sacramental sign of love .....	17
1.6.4 Metaphor: towards understanding .....	18

1.6.5 Other contemporary theologians: embodiment and language .....	18
1.7 Mary in the service of theological anthropology .....	20
1.8 Outline of thesis chapters .....	21
CHAPTER 2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF JOHN PAUL II'S	
<i>THEOLOGY OF THE BODY</i> .....	24
2.1 Philosophical foundations: debt to phenomenology .....	24
2.1.1. Influence of Kant.....	25
2.1.2 Influence of Scheler .....	25
2.2 John Paul's hermeneutical presuppositions .....	26
2.2.1 Scripture discloses truth .....	28
2.2.2 Principles of authentic scriptural exegesis: Dei Verbum .....	28
2.2.3 The powers of poetry and prayer.....	30
2.2.4 Myth and symbol as disclosive of truth .....	31
2.2.5 Creation: symbol of giftedness.....	32
2.3 John Paul's ontological pre-suppositions: grace and participation.....	33
2.3.1 Incarnation: the body as meaningful .....	34
2.3.2 The worthiness of the body .....	35
2.3.3 Creation: meaningful matter we know through metaphor.....	35
2.4 <i>Poiesis</i> : God's and man's .....	38
2.4.1 Creation as an act of divine poiesis .....	38
2.4.2 Poetry exerts a moral force.....	39
2.4.3 Poiesis: the mark of the man .....	41

2.4.4 Phenomenology and hermeneutics in close relation .....	41
2.4.5 The body and culture.....	43
CHAPTER 3 JOHN PAUL II'S <i>THEOLOGY OF THE BODY</i> .....	46
3.1 Genesis creation myths .....	46
3.1.1 Myth as literary genre .....	47
3.1.2 Scripture: interpreted encounters .....	49
3.1.3 Textual openness .....	51
3.1.4 Imago Dei.....	53
3.1.5 Criticism of John Paul's reading of scripture and the imago Dei.....	56
3.2 Original Solitude .....	61
3.2.1 Original solitude reprised: The Virgin Mary.....	63
3.3 Unity and Communion .....	66
3.3.1 The priority of the soma .....	69
3.3.2 Virginity as a sign of unity .....	70
3.4 Nakedness without shame .....	70
3.4.1 Purity of vision.....	70
3.4.2 Shame in Genesis 2:25 and 3:17 .....	71
3.4.3 Nakedness and corrupted vision.....	73
3.5 The spousal meaning of the body .....	76
3.5.1 Creation and persons as gifts.....	76
3.5.2 Sexual essentialism .....	77
3.5.3 Criticism of John Paul's sexual essentialism .....	82

3.6 The language of the body .....	88
3.6.1 Philosophic underpinning of ‘language of the body’ .....	88
3.6.2 Language and symbolic thought .....	90
3.6.3 The body as sacrament .....	92
3.6.4 Knowledge as action and gift of the body .....	93
CHAPTER 4 BODIES OF WORDS: POEMS MARIAN AND	
MATERNAL .....	95
4.1 Annunciation poems .....	97
4.1.1 Edwin Muir, ‘The Annunciation’ .....	97
4.1.2 Noel Rowe, ‘Magnificat: 1. Annunciation’ .....	104
4.1.3 Elizabeth Jennings, ‘The Annunciation’ .....	109
4.1.4 Bruce Dawe, ‘Mary and the Angel’ .....	112
4.2 Overview of Annunciation poems .....	119
4.3 <i>Pietà</i> poems .....	122
4.3.1 R.S. Thomas, ‘Pietà’ .....	122
4.3.2 James McAuley, ‘Pietà’ .....	129
4.3.3 Les Murray, ‘Pietà Once Attributed to Cosme Tura’ .....	136
4.3.4 Tric O’Heare, ‘Madonna of the Dry Country’ .....	143
4.4 Overview of <i>Pietà</i> poems .....	150
CHAPTER 5 TOWARDS A NEW MARIOLOGY: A THEOLOGY OF	
MARY’S MATERNAL BODY .....	154
5.1 Flowing (blood) .....	156

5.1.1 Sacrifice.....	156
5.1.2 Sustenance.....	160
5.1.3 Cleansing.....	162
5.2 Opening (vagina).....	164
5.2.1 Open in the liturgy.....	165
5.2.2 Open to the Father: Annunciation .....	167
5.2.3 Open to the Son: Crucifixion .....	172
5.2.4 Open lips .....	179
5.3 Expanding (uterus) .....	184
5.3.1 ‘Virgin Mother’: the paradox of converged boundaries.....	184
5.3.2 Boundary transformation: The Crucified Christ as birthing mother ....	193
5.4 Strengthening, effacing, dilating (cervix).....	198
5.5 Separating (the total body) .....	210
5.5.1 Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater” .....	211
5.6 Remaining (placenta).....	222
5.6.1 Symbiosis .....	222
5.6.2 Temporariness .....	227
5.6.3 Remainder .....	228
5.6.4 Interface.....	231
 CHAPTER 6 MARY’S MATERNAL BODY AS POEM OF THE FATHER, FOR CHRIST .....	  236
6.1 Body as an integral part of thinking .....	237



6.2. The body as poetic sign .....	240
6.3 The poetics of the maternal body .....	241
6.3.1 The maternal nature of poetic discourse .....	243
6.4 The poetics of Mary's maternal body .....	246
6.4.1 Annunciation: speaking life .....	246
6.4.2 Pieta: Eucharistic sign .....	250
6.4.3 The purposes of poems.....	252
6.5 The poetry of the Mary poem .....	253
APPENDIX A: ANNUNCIATION POEMS.....	255
R.S. Thomas, 'The Annunciation by Veneziano' .....	255
Edwin Muir, 'The Annunciation' .....	256
Elizabeth Jennings, 'The Annunciation' .....	257
Noel Rowe, ' <i>Magnificat</i> : 1. Annunciation' .....	258
Bruce Dawe, 'Mary and the Angel' .....	259
APPENDIX B: <i>PIETÀ</i> POEMS .....	260
R. S. Thomas, ' <i>Pietà</i> ' .....	260
James McAuley, ' <i>Pietà</i> ' .....	261
Les Murray, ' <i>Pietà</i> once attributed to Cosme Tura' .....	262
Tric O'Heare, 'Madonna of the Dry Country' .....	263
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	264

## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge, with grateful thanks, the skilled and patient supervision I have received from my supervisor, Professor Ben Quash, and from my secondary supervisor, Dr Susannah Ticciati. I am grateful to Professor Jeremy Begbie for having encouraged me to undertake this study. My thanks go, as ever, to faithful and interested friends, and stalwart family.

## Notes to reader

### (i) Concerning pronouns

The Austin Flannery edition of Vatican II documents uses ‘inclusive language.’ The English translations of other Vatican documents and of John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* use masculine pronouns as the default when referring to the human person. While this thesis aims to redirect attention towards the female, specifically maternal, body, I have not followed a practice of substituting feminine for masculine pronouns. The primary reason for not doing so has been to avoid ambiguity of reference and confusion in meaning. To use *she* when meaning *he and she* would cloud meaning in a thesis that often makes reference to the female alone. Where no such misunderstanding is likely, I have, on occasion, used the feminine generically of the human. More often, I have used *s/he* when referring to both women and men. I have retained the use of *mankind* although more often using *human* or *humankind*. Usage of the one or the other may be governed by how the rhythm of the sentence reads.

As far as possible, I have tried to avoid using personal pronouns of God. Where this is not possible, I have retained the classical usage of masculine pronouns and differentiated talk of the divine persons as *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit*. As much is said concerning creation, God the Father is quite often referred to as *Creator*. The intention is to maintain continuity with the orthodox tradition. The principle underlying this is that metaphors shape meaning. Substitutions for the familial terms, such as *Creator*, *Redeemer*, *Sustainer*, focus on the divine roles but lose the internal relationality of the Persons. It also risks, as noted by Janet Martin Soskice, ‘collapse into trithesim.’<sup>1</sup> Female substitutions for male terms would alter what is being claimed of God and run into difficulties with the manhood of Christ if one aims to retain a coherent account between the earthly crucified-resurrected sexed male body of Jesus and that same body, now ascended.

---

<sup>1</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, "Trinity and Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 142.

## **(ii) Use of ellipses and italics**

Ellipses in an original document are reproduced as in the original. Ellipses not in the original are enclosed within square brackets.

John Paul II often italicised words, phrases, or whole sentences that he wished to highlight. All italics used in quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are as in the original. Italics are also used, as per the referencing system used (Chicago 16<sup>th</sup> edition), where other systems may use quotation marks to indicate, for example, non-standard or metaphoric usage of a term. Italics are used in the main body of the text infrequently for emphasis; for most foreign words and phrases; for key terms; and when a word is used as a word, or a letter as a letter.

## **(iii) Reference books**

### ***Bible:***

All Bible references are taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, eds, Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

### ***Vatican II documents:***

The printed text of Vatican II documents, where used, is: Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (New York: Costello, 1996).

### ***Theology of the Body:***

The edition used is: John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans., introduction and index by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). All citations are to this edition and use the abbreviation 'TOB,' followed by the catechesis number, colon, paragraph number.

## Chapter 1 Thesis background, claims, issues

High on the end wall hangs / the Gospel, from before He was books.<sup>2</sup>

At his Wednesday general audiences between 1979 and 1984, Pope John Paul II delivered a sequential catechetical series concerned with the identity of the human person; a theological anthropology. The weekly instalments were adapted from a book manuscript he had written prior to his papal election in 1978. Originally entitled *Man and Woman He Created Them*, directly quoting Genesis 1:27, it has become superseded by a phrase he himself used one hundred times in the text: *The Theology of the Body*.<sup>3</sup> John Paul's catechetical series was unusual for a Wednesday audience in being delivered over such an extended period of time, and for giving attendant pilgrims much more than a customary greeting and blessing. While the general papal audience is a pastoral occasion, John Paul II's catechetical talks were uncompromising in substance, including academic references and footnotes, thus tying together pastoral occasion, catechetical intent (with its implicit call to conversion), and academic philosophical and theological grounding.

### 1.1 Defining *body*

As a preliminary step, it is necessary to establish how the key term, *body*, is used by John Paul. The *Theology of the Body* does not give a simple definition. In the most reliable, academically-annotated edition of the work, editor Michael Waldstein lists in the index four headings for *body*; each with multiple sub-headings. The first entry deals with 'fundamental concepts.' These are: that the person is embodied, meaning that the body is not something persons *have* but what they *are*; that generically, a human *is* a body, and is one among other bodies; that the body 'determines man's ontological subjectivity and participates in the dignity of the person'; that the body expresses the person, and in that sense, the person *is* the body. This understanding of the body was found by

---

<sup>2</sup> From "Church," (1.5-6), in Les A. Murray, *The Biplane Houses : Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2006), 67.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them : A Theology of the Body*, trans. and ed. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). See index: Body 1.

John Paul to be revealed in scripture. The content of that scriptural revelation is that the body has a ‘spousal meaning.’ In Waldstein’s words, John Paul sees his task in writing a theology of the body to ‘unfold and explain’ the scriptural revelation of the body, ‘helped by reflecting upon human experience.’ In carrying out this task, the pope has two broad foci: the meaning of the body (listed as the second of Waldstein’s index entries for *body*), and the experience of the body (the third of Waldstein’s entries). This latter John Paul refers to as ‘(re-) reading the meaning of the body.’

John Paul’s interest is the body in its natural state which functions as a sign. This natural body has objective meanings, against which any cultural construal can be measured. John Paul’s theology of the body does not subscribe to a notion of the body as being a socially-constructed entity with variable meanings. He does recognise how prevailing cultural norms can claim to change – he would say, falsify - the body’s meanings. John Paul recognises how social paradigms, within which bodies are situated, shape attitudes to the body, which in turn shape ethical codes pertaining to how persons are treated. The motivation for his work was to repudiate just such social attitudes that he saw as damaging to persons through their misrepresentation of the body’s meaning.

## **1.2 John Paul II’s intentions and methodology**

The pope’s immediate intention in writing his theology of the body was to defend Paul VI’s 1969 Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. That encyclical’s reception had been neither smooth nor uniform; its continuing proscription against artificial contraception alienating many not only outside the church, but within it. The controversy contributed to a growing disconnect between the sexual praxis of increasing numbers of Catholics and church dogma, brought to John Paul’s attention in the exercise of his priestly pastoral duties. He therefore sought not only to defend church teaching from the infiltration of opposing ideas from without, but to re-affirm the coherence and strength of Catholic teachings to those within the church who challenged or rejected them, particularly regarding sexual ethics. To achieve this aim, he followed Jesus’ scriptural injunction to go back to ‘the beginning,’ using the scriptural mythological creation account to contextualise what later developed as church dogma. This method of a return to earliest texts also served his wider purpose: to provide the

intellectual and faith resources to defend Catholic sexual ethics by means of a robust theological anthropology that was underpinned philosophically from the Western philosophic tradition and from scholarship more recent to his time of writing.

*Theological* anthropology, the study of man in relation to God, has tended to rely upon intellectual disciplines as its chief way of knowing, in contrast to *anthropology* as a social science, which has studied all aspects of human existence. John Paul combines both approaches, giving constant references to currents in philosophical and theological discussion, and describing common experience and the consciousness of having such experience. The Roman Catholic Church tests intellectual knowledge against the church's collective memory which functions as a type of 'internal sense cognition.'<sup>4</sup> It recognises several sources which store this collective memory, and from which it is accessible: scripture, tradition, the Magisterium, sacramental liturgy, prayer, the ministries and charisms of the church, the signs of apostolic and missionary life, and the witness of the saints.<sup>5</sup>

John Paul draws upon this collective memory, notably in his scriptural exegesis. He freshens scriptural revelation by putting it in dialogue with experiences common to daily living. In this way, he hopes to assist his listeners and readers towards deeper understanding of what it means to be human. John Paul's method draws upon internal intellectual resources of memory and imagination as a way to make sense of, and process, external sense data gleaned from living. This is the method used in the philosophical discipline of phenomenology; the study of how phenomena disclose themselves through being concretely experienced.

In keeping with his immediate aim, to defend *Humanae Vitae*, John Paul's major task is to set out how, in the experience of love, man realises his meaning. The expression of love he focuses upon is sacramental marriage, including its sexual dimension. This is not because marriage is considered determinative of man's and woman's existence but because it is the 'primal sacrament'

---

<sup>4</sup> John A. Oesterle, *Logic: The Art of Defining and Reasoning*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [hereafter CCC], 688. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc/archive/catechism/pls2c3a8.htm>

(cf. TOB 96:6, *inter alia*), present since the beginning of the world, which confirms the nature of man's origin in perfect love.

### 1.3 Hermeneutics and 'reading the body in truth'

Hermeneutics is central to John Paul's endeavour. He engages in biblical hermeneutics, interpreting the two creation myths of Genesis, which he intersperses with other wide-ranging scriptural references. His commitment to the phenomenological method, encouraging analysis of ordinary life experience, broadens the range of his interpretation to include speech and actions. John Paul's intention was to kindle an imaginative grasp among the faithful – and, potentially, among all people – of what it means to be human, how the body is meaningful and what truths it manifests. While John Paul's theological anthropology is a multi-faceted exercise in hermeneutics, hermeneutics is not his primary interest. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are put to the service of theological anthropology.

John Paul looks at how the fact of human embodiment determines how man knows anything of the world, including knowing what kind of creature he is, and how the meaning of the body is manifest or 'inscribed' in it. The body is the means of man's knowing but it also *knows* in the sense of having an innate awareness of itself. This meaning is accessible to all, as all are embodied, although scriptural revelation aids correct understanding. For John Paul 'rereading the body in truth'<sup>6</sup> is the primary task of the person, as of his own theological anthropology. John Paul's key phrase expressly connects the body with language, treating the body metaphorically as text. His method therefore begins with scriptural textual exegesis, then applies that method of interpretative reading to acts of living and the body that enacts. Two different types of thing, literary text and human body, are related to each other by the cognitive act of interpretation; each treated of as text to be read. His hermeneutic of the body enters the domain of body-poetics. Metaphor and poetics are therefore not alien to John Paul's theological anthropology, but intimately entwined in it.

---

<sup>6</sup> Used on forty-nine separate occasions in TOB. 'Reading the language of the body' occurs three times in TOB 118:4; once in 118:6. Waldstein, index: Body 3.



## **1.4 Core claims of this thesis**

The key findings of John Paul's theological anthropology, his hermeneutic strategy of 'reading the body,' and his reliance on phenomenology to clarify and confirm his findings, form the basis of the following claims made in this thesis. These claims are: (1) that John Paul's dual method of reading scripture as revelatory of the body, and treating the body as a revelatory text to be read, supports the idea that reality can be accessed through poetics. Poetic articulations may be literary, as in the case of scripture, or physical, as in the case of the body; (2) that fruitful theological reflection can therefore take place in, for example, the experience of reading literature, or the experience of embodiment; (3) that poetics may disclose some aspects of reality that literalist or scientific approaches alone cannot, so a hermeneutic of body-poetics is a legitimate resource to expand theological knowledge; (4) on the basis of the three preceding claims, it is further claimed that the maternal body of the Virgin Mary is given *for* Christ's body; her body being well expressed as 'poem of the Father.'

## **1.5 Establishing the claims**

These four claims are addressed by first of all, contextualising John Paul's theological anthropology within the philosophical ideas which shaped it, and within the exegetical assumptions which inform his work. His scriptural engagement and his core concept of *reading* the body invite some analysis of the place of metaphor in John Paul's hermeneutical exercise. His premise, as articulated in this thesis, that poetic expressions can disclose the Real and the True, is put to the test with a series of poetry readings. John Paul's further premise, that the body reveals the Real and the True, is tested by a detailed reading of the poetics of the obstetric body, as seen through the lens of the Virgin Mary. There are several issues that arise in these tests of the thesis claims.

## **1.6 Issues to consider**

### ***1.6.1 Selection of poems***

This thesis has identified John Paul's implicit interest in, and commitment to, the truth-bearing potential of literary poetics as a resource for theological anthropology. This thesis has chosen to look at poetics through a reading of a selection of literary poems, all of which deal in some way with Mary as their subject. Two issues arise. The first: why were poems chosen, rather than any other literary genre? Is there some quiddity of poems that makes them especially suitable as a way of disclosing reality? The second: why were these particular poems chosen? Does their subject – the Virgin Mary – prejudice the outcome, as far as their disclosure of the Real?

### ***1.6.2 Neglected embodiment: Virgin Mary***

Another issue concerns the focus given in this thesis to the obstetric body of the Virgin Mary; that is, to those body organs and that body system that distinguish her as a woman, and also distinguish her especial contribution to salvation history. Although the twentieth-century saw a prolific output in Roman Catholic publications on the subject of Mariology, and a large number of Marian societies formed to promote her veneration, Mary's maternity in terms of her full womanly embodiment did not receive attention. This thesis seeks to redress this neglect. Marian embodiment warrants theological scrutiny as it was this body in which God dwelt bodily in a unique way. One issue for this thesis is whether a presentation of Mary's maternal obstetric body is nevertheless consistent with Catholic orthodoxy which has tended to focus on her perpetual virginity, and her motherhood in a spiritual, rather than somatic sense.

### ***1.6.3 Obstetric body: sacramental sign of love***

In Part One of the *Theology of the Body*, 'The Words of Christ,' the first chapter, 'Christ Appeals to "The Beginning",' John Paul gives a close and extended theological and philosophical exegesis of the creation narratives of Genesis. From this reading, John Paul extracts the essentials that distinguish man, marking him out as different in kind from other living things. These essential qualities are: that man is given to himself by divine love; that man therefore inclines towards

others to whom he wants to make a gift of himself; that the body is sacramental sign. One of the issues for this thesis is to show how the obstetric body expresses these qualities and how a specifically feminine body manifests them in a particular way.

#### ***1.6.4 Metaphor: towards understanding***

It has been noted that John Paul invokes the metaphor of ‘reading the body in truth’ which will be taken up in this thesis; its application extended. As it is central to both John Paul’s ‘hermeneutic of gift,’ the fundamental way, says John Paul, to correctly understand the person, then *metaphor* as a way of speaking and thinking needs attention. Another issue for this thesis is therefore how it is that metaphor as a strategy, and this metaphor of ‘reading’ in particular, can be fruitful for understanding the body. This is more especially the case as this thesis makes a strong metaphoric claim for the body’s being a *poem*, and for the Virgin Mary being well thought of as a poem of the Father.

#### ***1.6.5 Other contemporary theologians: embodiment and language***

The final issue for this thesis pertains to what some other theological voices contribute by way of affirmation or challenge to John Paul’s theological anthropology. The years since the delivery and publication of the *Theology of the Body* have seen a renewed interest by theologians in the body as a subject of theological investigation. John Paul II is now one among a range of newer contemporary voices who have also defended a renewed interest in the sexed body, such as Gerard Loughlin and Sarah Coakley. Their approaches to the body differ from historic theological engagements which tended towards moral polemic aimed at the avoidance of concupiscence.<sup>7</sup> (John Paul’s theological anthropology is consistent with that inheritance, in that he

---

<sup>7</sup> As used in its common, restricted, and negative sense, the yearning for temporal things to gratify one’s sensuous appetites, rather than satisfying the good of reason. Roman Catholic theology holds that: (i) it is an inordinate desire that ‘sprang from [Adam’s initial] sin and incites to sin;’ (ii) man retains his ability to choose the good but must struggle, aided by God’s grace, to so choose; (iii) it is not of itself innately sinful; Adam and Eve’s original freedom from concupiscence was a ‘preternatural gift of God’ (Ming, John. "Concupiscence." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 26 Apr. 2010, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04208a.htm>). Freedom from concupiscence is not restored to man who is, though, given abundant grace in order to obtain victory over it. The mode of transmission of Adam’s original sin to the whole human race was a subject of debate among the Church Fathers. In the Western church,

devotes one chapter to the change effected by the primeval lapse into sin. His overall approach, though, is oriented far more positively on how the good of sexual relations within marriage contributes to the good of the spouses and the good of society.) Loughlin and Coakley are also sensitive to, and interested in, the structure and function of language; a particular interest, too, of Janet Soskice, in her work on metaphor, and of Rowan Williams, in his work on poetry.

Loughlin and Coakley share John Paul II's broad motivation of affirming the importance of the body and of lived experience, while pointedly diverging from him in their aim of changing ecclesial norms so as to expand the range of sexual practice that the church endorses. Gerard Loughlin contends the relevance of binary sexual distinctions for a theology of marriage, and of John Paul's inclusion of marital sexual relations within the *imago Dei*; Sarah Coakley contends the existence of the *natural* body and seeks a theological means to transcend a perceived sexual hierarchy within trinitarian theology. Her strong interest in the bodily nature of prayer is explored as a way to re-imagine ecclesial pastoral practice, and to re-imagine Christian doctrine from a feminist commitment.

While I share the interest and attention that these theologians give to issues of embodiment and am sympathetic to some of their concerns (reaffirming the centrality of the body as a legitimate locus of theological enquiry, expanding this *body* so as to include the sexual body, redressing imbalances in masculine biases), I arrive at some significantly different conclusions: that the body is not well thought of as being a social construction; that the 'spousal meaning' of the body does not prejudice women; that the obstetric body is a rich source of poetics; that the obstetric body as seen in the light of the Virgin Mary is a resource to further and better understand Mary, as well as the meanings of motherhood, womanhood, and being human.

---

Augustine's view prevailed, his explanation of original sin becoming the official position of the church at the Council of Orange, AD 529. Cf. Gerald Bray, "Original Sin in Patristic Thought," *Churchman* 108, no. 1 (1994).

## 1.7 Mary in the service of theological anthropology

The title and endpoint of this thesis suggests that the body of Mary serves the body of Christ; that it is *for* it. This orientation and purpose are detectable in Marian desire; in her bodily actuality; in the realisation of Mary's earthly life; in the eschatological life she is now believed to live, in unity with God. Mary's orientation towards God, recapitulates, and realises afresh, man's original orientation, which salvation history seeks to restore, which makes her the prototype of discipleship and foremost of the saints. This is consistent with Church tradition. While tradition and Church veneration have focused on her personal holiness, her sacred body has been reduced in the ecclesial imaginary, with most attention given to her perpetual virginity. Her personal holiness, though, as with all the saints, infuses her whole body. As John Paul reminds, in his *Theology of the Body*, the body is the manifestation of the person. It is therefore both desirable, and consistent with tradition that she be re-centred within theological anthropology for the following reasons.

Firstly, although Mary has been venerated at all levels of the church, lay and ordained, since the early years of Christianity, in 1977, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) remarked regretfully the decline of her veneration over the preceding years.<sup>8</sup> Her ecclesial diminution coincided with a period of social upheaval in the West, which included a societal reconfiguration of sexual boundaries and practices which was endorsed by substantial numbers within the church. John Paul II had sought to arrest this trend with his *Theology of the Body*, sustained by his personal and public devotion to Mary (his pontificate was dedicated to her, as expressed in his papal motto), imitation of whom he encouraged in the faithful, perceiving a need to restore Mariology within the church.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, if, as John Paul II claims, the body is to be taken heuristically, then the symbolically fertile female body warrants close examination for the unique contribution it makes to

---

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Richard H. Bulzacchelli, *Mary and the Acting Person: An Anthropology of Participatory Redemption in the Personalism of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II* (Dayton, OH: International Marian Research Institute, University of Dayton, 2012).

persons attaining a fuller vision of personhood and of God. To continue to omit Mary from the field of theological anthropology is to forfeit any particular insights that she can offer, whether from the perspective of her specific person, (Mary), or as representative figure, (woman), or as typological figure, (church). Woman's unique capacity to bring forth human life touches upon the mystery of life itself. The experiences of, and the facts of, gestation and birth give essential perspectives on being human, and on being in relation to God. To overlook these universal and foundational events is to neglect what is 'purely and simply feminine.'<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, just as Mariology was incorporated within Vatican II's document on the church, *Lumen Gentium*, in a move which resituated her *horizontally* as disciple and fellow sojourner, so Mariology contextualised within theological anthropology 'horizontally' affirms all women by, in the case of this thesis, explicitly honouring the female body. Such incorporation helps redress the over-articulation of the male as figuring mankind.

Fourthly, considering Mary's motherhood within the context of theological anthropology offers a perspectival shift as the Virgin is seldom considered as woman or as mother in a corporeal sense. Shifts in perspective are desirable in as far as they add to the body of knowledge. Through her inclusion within theological anthropology, the aim is, via an expanded maternal symbolics, to arrive at a new, somatically-grounded anthropology.

## **1.8 Outline of thesis chapters**

Chapter 2, 'Contextual Background of John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*,' outlines the contextual background of John Paul's theological anthropology relevant for this thesis: his philosophic foundations; his hermeneutical presuppositions; his ontological pre-suppositions; and how one of the distinguishing marks of man is his inclination and ability to make intransitive signs. As John Paul gives substantial attention to the Genesis creation accounts, *myth* is analysed as a genre, in terms of how it discloses truth. The foundational premise of John Paul's account is that matter is more than it appears to be; that it is a sign pointing beyond itself.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger, 25.

Chapter 3, ‘John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*,’ analyses John Paul’s exegesis of scripture generally, and *myth* in particular, as they appear in part one, chapter one, of the *Theology of the Body*. The chief findings that John Paul reads from the Genesis creation myths: man’s original solitude, man’s original unity, man’s original somatic harmony, and the spousal meaning of the body, are outlined. Two aspects of John Paul’s theology as it relates to the *imago Dei* and human sex distinction are considered from the critical perspectives of Gerard Loughlin and Sarah Coakley. The chapter ends by turning to an analysis of the term, ‘language of the body,’ which John Paul introduces in part two, chapter two, of the *Theology of the Body*, looking at the philosophic underpinning of the concept, and its connection with symbolic thought.

Chapter 4, ‘Bodies of Words: Poems Marian and Maternal,’ opens with a brief introductory recapitulation of the claims of this thesis, concerning the admissibility of reading poems in the expectation that they may manifest or disclose some aspect of reality. The poetry readings which then follow are done in the belief that literary poems can be looked to as embodied ways of knowing which speak to the prime theological interest of articulating and presenting truth. The poems chosen for reading are treated as forms of linguistic embodiment that speak theologically by virtue of being poems, not only in relation to their subject matter.

Chapter 5, ‘Towards a New Mariology: A Theology of Mary’s Maternal Body,’ I apply John Paul’s heuristic principle – that the body speaks - to the gestational and birthing (obstetric) body, looking at it through a Marian lens. The obstetric body makes concrete and expands the horizon of John Paul’s term for the structure of spousal sexual union, ‘uni-duality.’<sup>11</sup> This obstetric body makes possible an enriched appraisal of Mary as woman, and her divine motherhood of God in Jesus, and of her spiritual motherhood of the church.

Chapter 6, ‘Mary’s Maternal Body as Poem of the Father, for Christ,’ draws together the claims and tests of claim of this thesis, putting the poetic valences of the poems in conversation

---

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Women,” (1995), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_29061995\\_women.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html). §8.

with the poetic valences of Mary's maternal body, seeing how each speaks to each. Mary's body is argued to be well expressed by the metaphor that it is the poem of the Father.



## Chapter 2 Contextual background of John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*

### 2.1 Philosophical foundations: debt to phenomenology

Prior to his elevation to the papacy, John Paul had published two books known in English as *Love and Responsibility* (1960; English edition 1981) and *The Acting Person* (1969; English edition 1979), that provide the philosophical foundations for, and are precursors of, his theology of the body. John Paul offered both a critique and an alternative to the dominant twentieth-century attitude to materiality, derived from Bacon and Descartes, that materiality is value-free and something exterior to the person. The Cartesian mechanistic view of nature posited matter as an object over which the human could, and should, exercise power; the world being on this account, inhospitable. According to such a world view, there is no network of relations in which man and the rest of the natural order participate, so there is no conception of a unified natural order. The beauty of nature that man perceives is held to have no meaning; worse, to be a deceit. Man's only hope of finding meaning, on this account, is to find it within himself, in his own rational thought and will. As every person, though, is embodied, constituted as matter, this scheme splits the subject into a dualism of physical exterior, and spiritual interior.

Contra Gnostic and Cartesian tendencies, somatic unity points to the physical affecting the spiritual, and vice versa. It rejects any simple dualism that associates the physical with negativity; the spiritual with positivity, or that limits physicality to mere externality. John Paul, following Thomas Aquinas, upholds the unity of the person. In his "Letter to Families" (1994), he wrote that 'man is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter.'<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*: Letter to Families, (1994), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_02021994\\_families.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html). §19.

### ***2.1.1. Influence of Kant***

John Paul sought to explicate the Judeo-Christian alternative to pervading notions of the person derived from the philosophies of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Max Scheler (1874-1928). Kant's anti-trinitarian notion of personhood prioritized the autonomous, rather than the relational, self. The Kantian conception of autonomy meant the exercise of one's will without reference to data gleaned from the senses or emotions. In order to be autonomous, an act had to proceed from pure will, with no concern for that act's goodness or badness; such a consideration constituting a curb against the subject's will, so limiting the freedom to act. Such limitation was deemed to infringe upon personal dignity.<sup>13</sup> Experience is subjected to, and over-ruled by, rationality. For Kant, this meant that all sexual acts, even within marriage, diminished the personhood of the participants by diminishing their autonomy, as sexual union entails giving oneself to the other. Each, Kant deemed, became 'property' for the sexual use of the other.

While John Paul also repudiated any notion of a person's being used as a means for sexual gratification, he departed sharply from Kant's conception of marital sex. While the subjects do each renounce their autonomy, such renunciation does not diminish the persons. As the renunciation, or self-limiting, proceeds from love for the other, the persons are paradoxically enlarged. Spouses do not *use* each other but gift themselves to each other. In this freely-given, sacrificial, and total gift of self, the spouses find themselves.<sup>14</sup>

### ***2.1.2 Influence of Scheler***

The philosophy of Max Scheler (1874-1928) had been closely studied by John Paul and was the subject of his habilitation thesis. Scheler's thinking provided a foundation for the development of John Paul's thinking about phenomenology as later presented in *The Acting Person*. Scheler, contra Kant, claimed that love was at the heart of philosophy, and that the philosopher was

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Waldstein, introduction, 49-51.

<sup>14</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts, revised English ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).

positively motivated to understand and contemplate given phenomena. Whereas for Kant, emotions had been an embarrassment, dismissed to the realm of the irrational, for Scheler, they were more fundamental to the person than willing or knowing.<sup>15</sup> These intentional feelings manifest a value of a thing or person. A personal subject is conscious of experiencing these values; this experience being what constitutes him as a person.<sup>16</sup>

It was Scheler's reduction of the person to consciousness and the consequence of this, a lack of moral responsibility for his acts, against which Wojtyla constructed his conception of the 'acting person,' developed in his book of that title. Wojtyla had seen the value in the phenomenological method of Scheler, particularly the central position he accorded love. Scheler envisages love as a feeling at the person's inner core. The phenomenological method he used was applauded by John Paul late in his life for its being "a relationship of the mind with reality [...which is] an attitude of intellectual charity to the human being and the world, and for the believer, to God".<sup>17</sup> Even so, the younger Wojtyla had concluded that phenomenology must be subordinate to theology as it is the latter which deals with the real, God. Scheler's philosophy had raised consciousness to the supreme status, substituting it for the real person in the process.<sup>18</sup>

## **2.2 John Paul's hermeneutical presuppositions**

John Paul II's chief hermeneutical presupposition is that it is possible for any person to come to knowledge of truth owing to the nature of the person and the world s/he inhabits. To discern meaning in life presupposes a world invested with meaning and organised and structured so as to make itself intelligible. That the Christian tradition proclaims the world to be meaningful is based upon the belief, revealed in scripture, that it has been created (world as the speech-act of God) and God's having taken His own created material and made it His own in the Incarnation (God speaking the language of His own creation). In an exegetical circle, humans infer a meaningful and

---

<sup>15</sup> Waldstein, introduction, 66.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 65. Waldstein cites a 2003 address of John Paul II to the World Institute of Phenomenology.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 75-6.

accessible universe from the way humans speak; human speech indicating what sort of universe we inhabit. Augustine's analysis of the relationship between language and reality has been the subject of on-going reflections by Rowan Williams, who says that how we live and speak suggests that 'matter and meaning do not necessarily belong in different universes.'<sup>19</sup> To call our universe *created* is to acknowledge it as something given, and by virtue of its being a gift, each part of it points to the divine giver (see 2.2.5 below). All created things are therefore, in a primary way, signs, whose function is to point beyond themselves to the ultimate referent, God. This is well-expressed as: the 'essential quality' of the world is *sign*.<sup>20</sup>

The entanglement of *gift*, *language*, *matter*, and *sign* implies one who receives the gift, takes part in the conversation, is material, reads the signs, and participates in making further signs. John Paul's *Theology of the Body* is premised upon this understanding: that all created things may be read as signs, including the human body. Within such an understanding, there is no such thing as 'mere biology' (or *mere metaphor*) as everything is alive with meaning. John Paul II's theological anthropology, which teaches how to 'read the body in truth,' is focused much less closely on the biological body than is the case with this thesis, which is, nevertheless, consistent with his principles and premises.

A world that is a matrix of signs, inviting and awaiting understanding, (and *understanding* not in a shallow sense, such that 'when you know the code, you read off the content'<sup>21</sup>) is a world that warrants and rewards close observation. Metaphor is one of the chief outgrowths and enablers of attentive observance. John Paul gives such close watchfulness to the scriptures and to the body, where *body* includes its potentialities, signed in the type of body it is, and its realisations in relations.

---

<sup>19</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), x.

<sup>20</sup> Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's '*De Doctrina*,'" *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (1989): 141.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

### ***2.2.1 Scripture discloses truth***

The *Theology of the Body* is heavy with scriptural references and quotation. The first chapter of its Part One comprises some ninety pages of theological commentary and exegesis of the Genesis creation narratives. Normatively, Christians relate to scripture as that which anticipates and responds to, the coming into the world of God's definitive sign, Jesus. Again, Rowan Williams is helpful in his gloss of Augustine's view of scripture, that it is 'a paradigm of self-conscious symbolic awareness: it is a pattern of signs organised around – and by – the incarnate Word.'<sup>22</sup> Scripture in an especial way invites participation in its play of signs in order to be lead towards an ever-deepening love.

For Christian communities, biblical scriptures are believed to be divinely revealed, and so foundational for man's knowledge of God. They are regarded as being the inspired Word of God, although ideas of how to construe such inspiration, vary. The scriptures are deemed to reveal key aspects concerning God that would not be attainable in any other way.<sup>23</sup> In this, they enjoy exceptional status as texts unlike any other. They also, though, share properties of other non-canonical texts, being the products of historically-conditioned human writers, using human language-script for their messages. They may therefore be subjected to fields of academic textual enquiry, ranging from the historical, to the literary, to communication theories. In these senses, they may be regarded as texts like any other.

### ***2.2.2 Principles of authentic scriptural exegesis: Dei Verbum***

John Paul in his *Theology of the Body* reads scripture in the manner endorsed by the Vatican II document, *Dei Verbum*.<sup>24</sup> Scripture, it says, reveals divine realities; is inspired in a double

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female," *Theological Studies* 45, no. 3 (1984): 453.

<sup>24</sup> Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)

sense, with God the ultimate author, yet man the ‘true author’<sup>25</sup> of the text; is inerrant concerning the truth it expresses that is necessary for salvation. *Dei Verbum* acknowledges the trends of twentieth-century biblical scholarship, endorsing the application of the historical-investigative method and form criticism.<sup>26</sup> Owing to scripture’s being God’s Word expressed in human language,<sup>27</sup> attention is to be paid to the human aspects of the language used, and authorial intent. The unity of the scriptures is upheld,<sup>28</sup> meaning that they may be read inter-textually, even though separated by many generations in their composition. Sections 7-10 of *Dei Verbum* deal with textual transmission, emphasizing that it is the church who has authority to approve interpretations: ‘the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the church.’<sup>29</sup> In this it serves scripture by guarding it, listening to it, teaching it, and explaining it. It specifies the inter-relatedness of sacred tradition, scripture, and the magisterium, which mutually support each other.<sup>30</sup>

What *Dei Verbum* makes clear is that scripture belongs to the ecclesial body corporate. It is communal property prior to, and above, its being individual; an instantiation of what Janet Soskice has felicitously called the ‘profoundly social religious epistemology’ of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> The Bible is therefore not only an historical or a literary text. Its communal dimension sets the bounds of exegetical endeavour; all exegetical work is subject to the judgement of the church.<sup>32</sup> The church’s oversight is defensive, ordered to the prevention of error’s being transmitted. It sees the ultimate aim of biblical hermeneutics as being to mature the faith of the church by working towards a better understanding and explanation of scripture, in accord with tradition, and in harmony with other elements of the faith.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, "Monica's Tears: Augustine on Words and Speech," *New Blackfriars* 83, no. 980 (2002): 450.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

### 2.2.3 *The powers of poetry and prayer*

Imagination, governed by faith, is not seen as contrary to faith, and may enhance it. The outline above of *Dei Verbum* and the subordinate place it accords exegetes may suggest, by its restrictions, to have overly circumscribed the possibilities for imaginative exegesis, and thereby to have curtailed the possibilities for forging new understandings. However, the readings of Genesis undertaken by John Paul in his *Theology of the Body* militates against this fear. By imaginatively rereading the Genesis texts, John Paul is able to enrich the idea of the *imago Dei* and to apply it in a new way to the married couple. He also offers a more detailed and nuanced reading of the narrative specifics of the texts, using this to advance the discipline of theological anthropology. He is not primarily interested in historical questions about the texts, but in their poetic disclosive power.

John Paul is thereby making an implicit, in-principle claim for the licitness of using the imaginative faculties as a means to advance the church's understanding of God as seen through scripture. His reading of the Genesis stories is both imaginative, intellectual and informed by personal faith in harmony with the church. He reads to discern what God manifest in the text. His faith-commitment does not render his reading suspect or unreliable, but rather the reverse; that a fuller knowledge of God is liable to grow precisely in as far as it proceeds from a mind regenerated by faith.<sup>34</sup> While Scripture is open to rational inspection, and a rational reading could lead a reader to an intellectual assent to God's existence,<sup>35</sup> knowledge of God that is limited to intellectual assent is not the *telos* of scriptural revelation, which is saving knowledge of God, expressed as obedient faith.<sup>36</sup> Scriptural exegesis is therefore best conducted not only as an intellectual exercise, but as a practice

---

<sup>34</sup> Truth's formulations are 'produced by human reason wounded and weakened by sin.' John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*: On the Relation between Faith and Reason, (1998), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html). Encyclical. §51. Citing one of his earlier letters in *FR* 67, John Paul states, 'reason needs to be reinforced by faith, in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own.'

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Pius XII's Encyclical, *Humani generis* (1950), which opens with a reiteration of church belief in the possibility that human reason alone, apart from revelation and grace, could lead a person to a knowledge of God. See §2, 25, 29. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html)

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Eduardo J. Echeverria, "Once Again, John Paul II's *Fides Et Ratio*," *Philosophia Reformata* 69 (2004): 47.

of faith and a participation in grace. Proper receptive reading calls for a proper disposition so prayer for faithful interpretation is urged by John Paul.<sup>37</sup>

The nature of this approach expresses the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics (cf. 1.3 above). A phenomenon of the world, scripture is received and responded to by a human subject who embarks on a hermeneutical task which aims to receive truth from the text, but also to possibly expand or deepen those perceptions of the truth.

#### ***2.2.4 Myth and symbol as disclosive of truth***

The truth-bearing capacity of scripture holds, regardless of compositional genre of the various texts. For the contemporary mind, this presents a problem when it comes to the genre of myth, as with the Genesis creation texts. According to George Steiner, the distinctive characteristic of this genre is ‘openness to unknowing.’<sup>38</sup> Such openness is the ground of a quest for meaning that lies beyond the scope of the visible world to provide. Myth presses beyond the frontiers not only of the known but of the knowable. It deals with the weighty questions of man’s existence and demise, how one is to live and why one must die; a hermeneutical strategy to facilitate apprehension of truths which cannot be empirically demonstrated. The construction of myths makes available that which cannot be accessed by other means. They mediate erstwhile inaccessible truths as poetic narrative.

Mythology as a form of reflection about the world is not superseded with the progress of science. Scientific methodology gives revisable, partial access to truths about the world.<sup>39</sup> The *telos* of the natural sciences is to arrive at knowledge via demonstrable theories or verifiable explanations, which is clearly not a methodology suitable for all areas of knowledge (as, for example, the affective or the philosophic). There has been recent theological interest in identifying epistemes common to the sciences and the arts, such as the ‘critical realism,’ proposed by Anthony Monti.<sup>40</sup> Likewise,

---

<sup>37</sup> Waldstein, introduction, 22.

<sup>38</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 222.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 13. Monti here cites scientist, Brian Hebblethwaite.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



Rowan Williams has argued that the universe is ‘inherently symbolic,’<sup>41</sup> in a move that recasts ‘symbolism’ as an episteme not only for the arts, but for the sciences. A symbolic world is inherently allusive and representative, and, like the genome of which Williams writes, is ‘structured as a complex of patterns inviting recognition and constantly generating new combinations of intelligible structures.’<sup>42</sup> This suggestive quality implies a world ordered for some recipient, ‘it *becomes* a pattern only when there is a receiving and decoding “partner”.’<sup>43</sup> This concept of symbolic materiality is as far removed as possible from the (‘decadent’)<sup>44</sup> Cartesian concept of materiality as alien exteriorization.

### ***2.2.5 Creation: symbol of giftedness***

The notion of inherent symbolism in the world was the currency of medieval Christianity. Its trace is present in the notion of the world as gift, where the world represents and expresses the love of the divine giver.<sup>45</sup> On this view, the order of nature is the gifted context in which mankind dwells; participation in the world a participation in the set of relations that proceed from the created order’s common Source. This divine source is held, to a greater or lesser degree, to pervade the created order which retains a measure of grace, even after its wounding. Owing to this presence of graced goodness, the natural order is a constantly available resource pointing beyond itself and towards God. On this account, the natural order is not something to distrust or despise, but something to gratefully receive and learn from, as the Creator intended the meaning of the cosmos to be intelligible to, and progressively penetrable by, human understanding.

The concept of creation’s giftedness is secured by the Judeo-Christian concept of creation *ex nihilo*. To say creation proceeded from nothing is to say that it was not a necessity, it was created without any help, and it is not an extension of God’s own being. It is ontologically distinct

---

<sup>41</sup> Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*, 103. Although they have some broad points of contact, critical realism is not the position of Williams. See Catherine Pickstock, “Matter and Mattering: The Metaphysics of Rowan Williams,” *Modern Theology* 31, no. 4 (2015).

<sup>42</sup> Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*, 103.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>45</sup> The giftedness of creation is strongly expressed in the theology of Spanish Carmelite mystic, St John of the Cross, (1542 – 1591), on whose theology of faith Wojtyła wrote his first doctoral thesis.

from its maker. David Schindler sees this real giftedness of the creature from nothing as securing the possibility of creaturely participation in his own self-realising: 'his own self-constitution [occurs] only from "inside" the act of creation.'<sup>46</sup> The act of being is both given to, and exercised by, the creature.<sup>47</sup> This paradox of creation Schindler dubs 'receptive self-constitution'.<sup>48</sup> That is, the creature is both profoundly other than God; a receptive subject 'in and by means of which God's act is received,'<sup>49</sup> and simultaneously dependent through and through on God's communication of being. The giftedness, and therefore implicit reception, of creation is an expression of generous Love. The constitutive meaning of the creature is therefore '*to be loved by and to love (the Creator)*.'<sup>50</sup>

### 2.3 John Paul's ontological pre-suppositions: grace and participation

The implications of two of these ontological principles of creation: that the created order is infused with God's sustaining grace,<sup>51</sup> and that the human creature participates in this in a distinctive way, are important as the grounds of this thesis. Owing to its being divinely infused, the world is inherently meaningful; a site of meaningful truths. That is to say that the created order has epistemic potential; that being structured according to the hermeneutic of gift, it is something to be received and understood, although not without effort.<sup>52</sup> The human body is not exempted from bearing this epistemic potential. Not only is the body-person the site where such understanding takes place, the body itself is an object towards which understanding can be directed. It is a manifestation of intelligible materiality; 'a *meaning* portion of matter.'<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> David L. Schindler, "Being, Gift, Self-Gift: A Reply to Waldstein on Relationality and John Paul II's Theology of the Body (Part One)," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 42 (2015): 238.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. CCC, 299, 'creation comes forth from God's goodness, it shares in that goodness.'

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, humans 'can understand what God tells us by means of his creation, though not without great effort and only in a spirit of humility and respect before the Creator and his work.'

<sup>53</sup> Rowan Williams, "On Being a Human Body," *Sewanee Theological Review* 42, no. 4 (1999): 406.

### 2.3.1 Incarnation: the body as meaningful

The meaningfulness of the body is confirmed by the Christian dogma of the Incarnation; the belief that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was incarnated as the man, Jesus of Nazareth. God's definitive self-revelation<sup>54</sup> is flesh before being translated into literary text, as the epigraph of chapter 1 declares.

Christ's having lived a fully human life occasioned theological debate in the early centuries of the church about the implications of this for the common valuing of corporeality. Those tensions and disagreements finally favoured an affirmation of the goodness of the body, even while acknowledging its limitations.<sup>55</sup> Jesus' divine incarnation is held to be the definitive expression of human personhood, as well as mediating divine personhood, precisely through His body. The necessity for a hermeneutic of the body is therefore confirmed and fortified by the Incarnation as it is Jesus' body that became, and so Christians believe, continues to be, the place of God's redemptive gift of self, while simultaneously being itself that gift. Owing to the Incarnation, the study of God and the study of the body are therefore not only properly linked but inseparably so: 'Through the very fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology [...] through the main door' (TOB 23:4).

What also entered through the main door is hermeneutics, specifically, the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics (cf. 1.2 above). As persons are phenomena in the world, God in the Incarnation made Himself subject to common interpretation. In Augustinian terms, Jesus, who as God, is 'supremely "res"'; the context of all else that exists, is also, as the Word-made-Flesh, a unique *signum* which is the speech of God.<sup>56</sup> Jesus is a sign that stretches hermeneutical capacity, so implicitly leading us towards an activation of the imagination. God manifest as Jesus confounds understanding, incapacitating linguistic expressivity (cf. Luke 2:34). His

---

<sup>54</sup> Cf. John 1:18.

<sup>55</sup> See 2.3.2, following, concerning inclusions and exclusions of the body from the concept of the imago Dei.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's '*De Doctrina*'", 140-41.

*call* is that of the definitive master-work of art (cf. 3.4.1, below) that confronts our stumbling efforts at interpretation (cf. Mk. 8:27; Mt. 16:13). To answer the call is to make a hermeneutic commitment.

### **2.3.2 *The worthiness of the body***

John Paul II's inclusion of corporeality as essential to what it is to be human positions his anthropology within that lineage of patristic theologians who also took an integrative, unitary view of the body, (body as a composite of body and spirit), among whom: Irenaeus (c.120-200 AD), Theodore of Mopuestia, (c.350-428 AD), and Ephrem of Syria (c.306-373 AD). However, even among those patristic writers who did hold a unitary view of the person, not all affirmed the body's value. Some found the body unworthy, or otherwise ineligible, to be included within the concept of the *imago Dei*, among whom: Melito of Sardis (died c.180 AD) and Tertullian (c.155-240 AD). Among those who held a unitary view and also interpreted the *imago Dei* as including the body, were Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian (c.200-258 AD).<sup>57</sup> John Paul's attitude to the body is distinguished from early negative views, influenced by Gnosticism or Platonism, such as, for example, that expressed by *Mathetes* in the late second-century, that 'The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it,' and 'The soul is imprisoned in the body.'<sup>58</sup>

### **2.3.3 *Creation: meaningful matter we know through metaphor***

Some of the early church's priest-theologians did attest to the epistemic nature of creation; its truths discoverable, or discernible, in a unique way by humans who have the fullest creaturely capacity to receive and respond to them.<sup>59</sup> This attestation of the world's openness to interpretation implies the necessity of a hermeneutic of *text*; (*world* understood as that which is read). This involves a commitment to a certain way of understanding texts, and of the relationship between author, text, and reader. Such a textual hermeneutic implies, *a priori*, a hermeneutic of language. If

---

<sup>57</sup> Christopher John Gousmett, "Shall the Body Strive and Not Be Crowned? Unitary and Instrumentalist Anthropological Models as Keys to Interpreting the Structure of Patristic Eschatology" (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1993), 22-7, [https://earlychurch.org.uk/book\\_gousmett.php](https://earlychurch.org.uk/book_gousmett.php)

<sup>58</sup> *Epistle to Diognetus*, VI. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>

<sup>59</sup> Cf. For example, Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), who interpreted the created order as showing forth the resurrection in the daily transition from night to day, or the seasonal transition from planting to harvest (a different iteration of the dark-to-light trope). *First Apology*, chapter XXIV.

the world is meaningful, its meanings discoverable and communicable, then *language* is implicated from the world's beginning.

### 2.3.3 (a) *Symbol and metaphor: Ricoeur*

Meaningfulness is often mediated linguistically via symbol and metaphor. Once thought of as dispensable surface adornments,<sup>60</sup> so arbitrary communication tactics, metaphor is now seen to be strongly rooted in thought structures.<sup>61</sup> The broad definitional frame of Paul Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor*<sup>62</sup> is that metaphoric predication draws into relationship two terms that are not alike, and in this difference, pronounces a perceived similarity, forging a tensile relationship between the literal meanings of each term and their metaphoric meaning in their enigmatic union. Ricoeur borrows the term, 'semantic impertinence,'<sup>63</sup> to describe the semantic challenge of the relationship between the metaphoric terms which, he says, establish "proximity" in spite of "distance".<sup>64</sup> Ricoeur, that is, proposes that at the heart of metaphor is paradox, or logical inconsistency.<sup>64</sup>

Ricoeur seems to be suggesting that the surprise element ('impertinence') dominates, but the force of such surprise is ordered towards persuasiveness. His account of metaphoric structure relies upon contrast ('distance') at two levels: between, using I.A. Richards' terms, the tenor and vehicle, and between their literal and metaphoric meanings. That the terms of a metaphor productively interact within the mind of a reader is nuanced differently by different theorists but is uncontentious. What has proven to be contentious is the idea Ricoeur advances of two levels of meaning, the literal and the metaphoric; the interaction between the two giving metaphor its force.<sup>65</sup> Recent cognitive

---

<sup>60</sup> David Burrell (1973) traces the pervasiveness of this idea to the Renaissance. Burrell links theories of metaphor to world-views, so the 'decorative' view assumes that there can be a straight-forward correspondence between the world and language; that 'an unambiguous picture of the world is renderable in principle.' Cited in Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 202.

<sup>61</sup> Metaphor is 'a way of deriving new abstractions.' Dedre Gentner and Brian Bowdle, "Metaphor as Structure-Mapping," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 110.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 194. The borrowing is from Jean Cohen.

<sup>64</sup> The cognitive science model, 'structure mapping engine,' finds the initial reading/mapping of a metaphor to be 'typically inconsistent.' Gentner and Bowdle, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Monti, 63.

science has indicated that the whole of a metaphoric statement is imaginatively grasped at once, both the literal meaning and the metaphorical. This involves cognitive processing that can process literality within a metaphor, even while leaping beyond it.<sup>66</sup> The reader registers that the statement is literally false while also registering that this is not the point.

### 2.3.3 (b) *Symbol and metaphor: Polanyi*

Michael Polanyi's (1891-1976) theory of metaphor, as explained by Anthony Monti, seems closer to the recent findings of cognitive science. Polanyi theorized that the performance of linguistic tasks, such as processing a metaphor, involved the same cognitive skills and processes as the performance of physical tasks. Polanyi suggested that a masterly performance of a physical task involved two levels of awareness, the 'focal' and the 'subsidiary.' These are interactive, mutually-supportive, and simultaneously present. It is the latter subsidiary, or background, awareness that gives the performer a tacit understanding of the task that is occupying him. In Monti's words, this involves 'intuitive perception rather than correct deduction.'<sup>67</sup>

Polanyi opened a door to a new way of understanding the complexity of how the body *knows* in the performance of tasks, and how such knowing has similarities with how the mind knows. Polanyi's schema of the mutual support of 'focal' and 'subsidiary' types of attention, can be transposed to the dual levels of attention which the mind gives to the literal and metaphoric meanings of metaphor. The indicators from cognitive science that Polanyi's theory is confirmed, lend credence to intuitions, such as Gadamer's (see 2.3.3 (c) below), that metaphor is the primary way we engage with the world. Viewed from the reverse perspective, if the world we inhabit is intrinsically metaphoric, then that dimension seems to be readily accommodated in human acts of knowing.

### 2.3.3 (c) *Metaphor as a thought structure*

Metaphor and symbol are linguistic constructs but prior to this, they are thought structures. We speak metaphorically because we think metaphorically. Metaphor expands thought in

---

<sup>66</sup> Gentner and Bowdle, 112. Metaphor is processed in the same way as literal comparisons, and a reader can grasp both a literal and a metaphoric interpretation at once.

<sup>67</sup> Monti, 57.

the same structural way that human-world relations take place: whatever is new (*unknown*) we seek to understand via something familiar (*known*). This basic structure of metaphor, yoking the familiar with the unfamiliar so that they are perceived differently, and a new perception occurs, is the methodology of poetry.

As per the theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002),<sup>68</sup> persons experience the world as multiple acts of interpretation; (we could add from Polanyi, that not all of these would be ‘focal’ acts). This expansionary increase in knowledge reaches outwards to the new while also redounding to what had been known, each term modifying the other. Metaphor is the primary strategy for communicating an insight or extending understanding. The position taken in this thesis is that metaphor is the primary hermeneutic which conditions and shapes how we make sense of the world.

## **2.4 *Poiesis*: God’s and man’s**

### **2.4.1 *Creation as an act of divine poiesis***

As already mentioned (2.2.5 above), two ontological principles can be deduced from the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. Firstly, that the world is radically not-God, and secondly, that being created, the structure of relationality is intrinsic to the world (it proceeds from somewhere to elsewhere; from Source to terminus). The two Genesis creation texts speak of the world as being an intentional production proceeding from the creative force of God. This conception supports the world’s being thought of analogically as the art-work of God. There is ancient precedent in the tradition for this: St Ambrose (c.340-397 AD) spoke of the human body as being ‘a superb piece of divine art.’<sup>69</sup>

The biblical texts present the cosmos as an ordered unity proceeding from God. Human art productions echo in their finite way this structure of taking material, ordering it, or fitting

---

<sup>68</sup> Sallie MacFague notes how his description is ‘nearly a correlate of what we have described as metaphorical thinking.’ MacFague, 58.

<sup>69</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, Dissertation Series / American Academy of Religion (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 87.

it together, 'to form a new unity that the human agent intends to serve some purpose.'<sup>70</sup> (*Art* is understood broadly to mean any medium of visual or literary art, including poetry). This is not to imply that art is ideologically driven (the hall-mark of propaganda) but that it hopes to present something in such a way that a new vision takes place. It invites and facilitates a new vision; it does not impose it.

As mentioned above, implicit within the concept of gift is reception. These two principles: that the world is the created-from-nothing work of God, and that it is given from, by, and through God, imply a moral obligation on the part of the created order to respond to this act of love. George Steiner sees just such a moral obligation attaching to works of art. Steiner contends that in beholding an art-work, an act of encounter,<sup>71</sup> a type of relation is formed with attendant moral accountability. This Steiner calls art's 'answerability.'<sup>72</sup>

#### ***2.4.2 Poetry exerts a moral force***

Steiner's claim rests upon an assumption that art is not neutral material; that it is distinguished from other objects. Its distinction lies in its having been configured as an object of meaningful matter that 'speaks.' This presupposes a someone who will hear its address. This is one dimension of the moral force it exerts: it stands within the world as a speaking presence, inviting conversation. There is no moral compulsion to reply, as art does not coerce. One may discern, though, a moral pull to make a response in a way that honours the labour of its creation.<sup>73</sup> Contemplation may be the most suitable response.<sup>74</sup>

The other dimension of art's moral force relates to its gratuity. Its *factum est* is the rationale for its existence. Being is the reason for being. While God is the only instance of absolute predication ('I Am Who I Am'), man, God's supreme creation, is imbued with his own irreducibility:

---

<sup>70</sup> Gary M. Gurtler, "Plotinus on the Limitation of Act of Potency," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7, no. 1 (2009): 38.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur on 'standing before the text' as a transformative encounter.

<sup>72</sup> Steiner, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Les Murray, "On Being Subject Matter," in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 40.

<sup>74</sup> Les Murray, "Embodiment and Incarnation," in *A Working Forest* (Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 322.



the fact of his being secures his right to be. This is a way in which art analogically images man the divine image. Art is that production which therefore befits man's stature. Neither man nor art serve a utilitarian purpose. Owing to that philosophic stance of repudiation of the utilitarian, art is an object always politically engaged in its sub-stratum. It does not exist to generate profit (for this reason, poetry-writing is a purer art form than the visual arts which are more readily absorbed into, and corruptible by, art markets). To the extent that it does not compromise its nature as a gratuitous object, gratuitously made, art resists becoming an object of power. That very failure of power-structures to contain it imbues it with its own authority, making it dangerous for those who aspire to totalitarianism.

An embedded paradox of an art-work is that it is a thing set apart from other things yet is a thing whose conversational structure relies upon its not being an object distant from *me* and *my* experience. Its very presence within someone's sensory field is already a way of person and object 'entering into relationship.'<sup>75</sup> An art-work is *other* in having a transcendent dimension that points away from itself to something else, but it is not wholly other. The nature of such an artistic relationship is transient, in the sense that the receiver needs repeated rests from it,<sup>76</sup> but the attractive force of the relationship may last a lifetime. Appreciation of the art need not imply any concomitant moral commitment as to its content.<sup>77</sup> Even art fashioned so as to express particular values or truths may not necessarily realise its maker's intention.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Williams, "On Being a Human Body," 404-5. Williams here cites Merleau-Ponty in relation to the way the body perceives. This relation has been more strongly represented by Lakoff and Johnson who identified the metaphoric nature of our thinking and speaking of our 'visual field' as a container, within which we perceive ourselves to be. Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 30. ff

<sup>76</sup> Les Murray, "Poems and Poesies," in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 374.

<sup>77</sup> Trevor Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language and Literature*, Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 112. Hart here cites C. S. Lewis.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur who makes the distinction within the category of "signification" between what an author intended to signify, and what a text actually signifies. Paul Ricoeur, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics: Writings and Lectures, Volume 2*, ed. Daniel Frey and Nicola Strickler, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 12.

### ***2.4.3 Poiesis: the mark of the man***

Artist and poet, David Jones, (1895-1974), in his 1955 essay enquiring into the nature of art, attributes its moral value to both its gratuitous presence and the intransitive nature of its signing; it is, as is an intransitive verb, 'the subject and object of its own activity.'<sup>79</sup> Animals and birds also make things, but their creations are only functional, ('transitive'),<sup>80</sup> so do not qualify as sign-making. The uniqueness of man's sign-making leads Jones to say that '*poeta*' is the title best befitting the human.<sup>81</sup> Acts of *poiesis* necessitate a body; disincarnate entities cannot make. Owing to sign-making's reliance on the human body, art signifies and affirms the body's goodness: 'the body is not an infirmity but a unique benefit and splendour.'<sup>82</sup> If, in making signs, man realises a distinctive creaturely capacity, and if this capacity is possible only by virtue of embodiment, then the body is not something unworthy of man's stature (cf. 1.3.2 above), nor obstructive to the realisation of holiness.

Jones' philosophical endorsement of the body's goodness, and his celebratory affirmation of it, accords with the position of this thesis.

### ***2.4.4 Phenomenology and hermeneutics in close relation***

If art-works do call for a response, then human embodiment is doubly implicated as persons act as receptors and generators of art. Persons have a unique creaturely capacity to cognize intransitive signs (whereas functional signs of, for example, smoke signalling fire, are cognized by animals, as well as persons), and to echo divine sign-making in the finite order. Converging the metaphors of Augustine and Steiner, we can say that humans are answerable to the divine art-work of creation by virtue of living within it, and of being themselves the highest-order creaturely art-works.

To make a response implies a prior cognitive act of recognition. This recognition constitutes, at the least, a putative form of knowledge. Understanding can develop when such

---

<sup>79</sup> Graham Pechey, "'Frost at Midnight' and the Poetry of Periphrasis," *Cambridge Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2012): 232.

<sup>80</sup> David Jones, "Art and Sacrament," in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London: Faber, 1955), 149.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

knowledge becomes the subject of contemplation.<sup>83</sup> A response is an act of interpretation, and interpretation is, according to Paul Ricoeur, the central problem of hermeneutics.<sup>84</sup> Turning his attention to the hermeneutics of revelation, Ricoeur's 1977 essay reflected upon the theological import of biblical genres in which the revelatory function of the texts is modulated differently. Ricoeur argues that genre is not just 'a rhetorical façade'<sup>85</sup> but functions within the text theologically. When the form of revelation (genre) is taken seriously, the concept of revelation is revealed to be 'polysemic and polyphonic.'<sup>86</sup>

A major advantage of this approach for Ricoeur is that his hermeneutical method does not disconnect regular human experiences from acts of biblical interpretation. Persons order and make sense of their own lives in multiple daily acts of interpretation. Ricoeur is therefore able to claim that he approaches revelation in an 'a-religious sense.'<sup>87</sup> Ricoeur calls attention to the nature of the biblical texts as 'originary,' that is, having been written closer in time to the events they record, and so closer to the primary effects of those events. These texts are not written as neutral records of events but as the first interpretations of the definitive events that shaped the Christian community's belief. Using Gadamer's term, they are 'engaged' texts (text and interpreter engaged in a dialogue to arrive at truth). In their engagement, they mimic the way in which persons experience ordinary life. Anyone can experience a sense of having been 'seized' by some event and have a sense that the seizure will prove life-shaping.<sup>88</sup> In the case of the biblical texts, Ricoeur claims it is only their subsequent systematization into propositional faith claims that 'neutralizes' them by dissociating them from their expressive genres.

Ricoeur's thinking about how different genres differently reveal reclaims ground for the medium of the message, seen not in reductive terms as a means to the end of delivering certain

---

<sup>83</sup> Ricoeur sees interpretation as: 'the alternating of the phases of understanding and those of explanation along a unique "hermeneutical arc".' Ricoeur, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," 9.

<sup>84</sup> Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics."

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 132.

content, but as a contributor to, and shaper of, that content. Ricoeur is theorizing a symbiotic relationship between message-content and message-form. His approach, as noted, engaged a single paradigm by which all acts of interpretation, secular or sacred, are made. In arguing that genre and content form a single, symbiotic, expressive unity, Ricoeur's theory contributes to restoring of a sense of the sacramental. David Jones had argued that improper fragmentation of that which should properly be united, wounds a sacramental sense (a sacrament being a sign which confers the grace it signifies).<sup>89</sup> Ricoeur's theory also recasts the propositions of faith so they more nearly resemble what they originally were: not something done in the mind, but something forcefully experienced within a living community. We could say that his hermeneutical method re-sites faith claims within the whole body, not only within the mind.

#### ***2.4.5 The body and culture***

One analogy by which to express the person's ability to objectify her own body is that of reading a text. Each person's body is the fundamental text of encounter. The manner of this encounter differs in kind from any other, as, in Rowan Williams' words, 'the body is never simply an object in my field of perception.'<sup>90</sup> Drawing upon the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Williams helpfully reflects that this difference means that our perception of occupying space is the unconscious backdrop of our engagement with the world, while also shaping that world in which we live and move. Being oriented in space; having to face a direction, means that we are constantly navigating obstacles. This facing-toward is already a form of relationship with what we see or move towards (or away from). Our bodies are therefore constantly bound up with 'attitudes, projects, and relationships.'<sup>91</sup> The body is in this sense, inherently intelligent as a site from which negotiations with the world are conducted. The implication of this, for Williams, is that the natural body is never a neutral organism; it is always already engaged with culture. Persons organize and symbolize their

---

<sup>89</sup> Jones, 176.

<sup>90</sup> Williams, "On Being a Human Body," 404.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 405.

engagements with the world, not excluding their bodily needs and desires, as, for example, in eating's symbolization as social bonding.

While I concur that the body from (before?) its birth is entangled with culture, I am cautious about over-articulating the role of culture, the extreme expression of which would claim culture to be determinative of the body. The body is the manifestation of an acting person who can resist, or choose, at least in part, to selectively disengage from its cultural entanglements. A discriminatory cultural appropriation could be seen as a moral imperative for each life and as informing the primary task given to the church: the evangelical commission to reach (therefore, change) all cultures. The form of cultural resistance that Christianity advocates is to turn to, and embrace, the *a priori* culture of faith that constituted 'the beginning.' The need for cultural *metanoia* is the starting point from which John Paul begins his theological-anthropological task; that contemporary culture has a distorted and erroneous conception of the body, as manifest in its misrepresentation of sexual relations.

To say, as does Rowan Williams, that the body is involved with culture from the outset is to say that the body and its functions are 'part of language.'<sup>92</sup> John Paul II also perceives the body in terms of its engagement with language, and so, in this sense, as entwined with culture. However, he understands something different by *culture*. In his close focus upon the ancient myths of origin, John Paul is occupied with language as the originary event; the works of creation being the saying and the what-was-said, of God. On this account, language is entwined with the body but the culture within which the body negotiates the world is that of prevenient grace. This is the culture that precedes and grounds human social culture.

The task John Paul set himself (and his readers) is to 'read the "language of the body" in the truth' (TOB 118:6).<sup>93</sup> This language of the body speaks its filial-spousal meaning, inscribed in it by God, resulting from its source in God ('filial') who is also its *telos* ('spousal'). This

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>93</sup> 'Rereading' the language of the body has sixty entries in TOB. See Waldstein index entries for 'Reread' used as a verb, and as a noun.

dual relational metaphor is a way of expressing the intimate participatory nature of personhood in God's self-giving love. Drawing upon Williams' spatial terms, we can say: creatureliness is an orientation towards others by virtue of humans being kin to divine otherness.

## Chapter 3 John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*

The focus of this chapter is upon John Paul's reading of the Genesis creation myths. It begins by looking at certain ways in which myth can be understood as truth-bearing. It then looks into John Paul's reading of these stories and four key truths he finds they disclose to man about himself, (solitude, unity and communion, nakedness without shame, the spousal meaning of the body), contrasting man's original and current conditions. Two of John Paul's readings that have attracted criticism: his inclusion of spousal union as an especial signifier of the *imago Dei*, and his purported sexual essentialism, are looked into from the point of view of two critics, Gerard Loughlin, and Sarah Coakley, and measured against their criticisms. There follows an analysis of what John Paul meant by his key concept, 'the language of the body,' and how this concept is defensible philosophically and linguistically. The chapter ends with an overview of how John Paul construes the biblical usage of 'knowledge' not just as a cognitive function but as a fully somatic experience.

### 3.1 Genesis creation myths

In turning to the two creation stories in Genesis, the pope is treating them as revelatory, being part of the scriptural canon; as truth-bearing, being part of the living word of scripture; and as foundational to the whole scriptural canon, being its theological underpinning. Such serious reliance upon ancient mythological texts, acknowledged to be such by John Paul II (cf. TOB 3:1, n 4), is intended not to affront a rational, scientific and historical world-view, so much as to imply the limits of operating exclusively within its boundary.

John Paul's turn to the creation myths follows the gospel lead of Jesus who, when interrogated by the Pharisees about contemporary marriage practices and their implications (Mat. 19:3-12; Mk. 10:1-12), directed them to the two Genesis accounts of man's beginning. In directing attention to the beginning of mankind, Jesus is simultaneously positioning his interlocutors as the objects of His teaching ('You, read this') and as the subjects of that teaching ('Read about yourself'). Deploying this tactic reminds them that they are not only the detached observers/enforcers of the law they purport to be but are participants within it. In pointing to the

creation myths, Christ is pointing to the original order of the world which transcends history, in the mythic pre-historic *beyond*. The transcendent atemporality of myth reminds man he is circumscribed by time and space, and points to his fleeting earthly existence. Myth also attests to the macro-continuity of that existence; that every human life ‘begins at the beginning [...] the same problem of good and evil [...] the same need to learn how to live’<sup>94</sup> and follows the same developmental arch or ‘ancestral pattern.’<sup>95</sup> Referring his questioners back to their mythical origin is to re-contextualise their contemporary cultural ideas and to assess to what extent the present coheres or diverges from the truths of the narrative. Jesus clearly regards the texts as being authoritative and having ‘normative meaning’ (TOB 1:4) and in citing both accounts, treats them as organically connected. This internal warrant one would not expect to be persuasive for those who do not subscribe to the authority of Judaeo-Christian scripture, though. The warrant may appear more persuasive, and less misaligned with the historic context within which the pope wrote, if one turns to a consideration of myth as a genre.

### ***3.1.1 Myth as literary genre***

In his essay, “Genesis as Myth,”<sup>96</sup> Edmund Leach defines myth as that which seeks to communicate knowledge of some reality which is not observable in terms which are observable. Two features of myth are that they occur in a variety of versions (‘redundancy’) and are expressed according to a series of binaries or opposing categories. When the messages they express are believed to be God’s Word, multiple versions are reassuring in so far as the different versions reinforce the essential meaning. Leach himself proceeds to read the Genesis texts as inter-related, forming a complex of repetitions, inversions and variations where, within a common structure, patterns recur. While not explicitly dealing with myth, Edwin Muir’s essay, “The Natural Estate,”<sup>97</sup> explores the connection between traditional folk ballads and the communities which

---

<sup>94</sup> Edwin Muir, "Poetry and the Poet," in *The Estate of Poetry* (Saint Paul, MI: Graywolf Press, 1962; reprint, 1993), 87.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>96</sup> Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969).

<sup>97</sup> Muir, "The Natural Estate."



generated them as part of his wider project to investigate the distance between the poet and the public. Muir's own Orkney childhood, steeped in folkloric tales and ballads, had uniquely equipped him to comment upon this. The communal and familial life he experienced there, tied closely to the land and sea, governed by the seasons, contrasted sharply and favourably with the Glasgow slum life he witnessed and lived alongside as a teenager. He was able to understand the distancing effects of the 'vast dissemination of secondary objects' which isolate people from the natural world which in turn adversely affects the imagination. In common with the various versions of the most potent myths, the oral tradition of ballad transmission meant that many versions of a work existed, each generation actively contributing to the final modified version. Muir notes an economy of expression and structure in the best ballads: 'extreme simplification of form and content,' or again: 'an ancestral vision simplified to the last degree.'<sup>98</sup> Muir concludes that the traditional ballad demonstrates that 'great poetry can, or once could, be a general possession,'<sup>99</sup> which invites a reconsideration of the radical availability of the ancient mythic poetic texts of the Bible.

In his early essay, "Myths, signs, significations," Gerard Loughlin contrasts a literal reading of a text, where the text is read as a sign (so, a signifier expressing the signified; form expressing meaning), with Roland Barthes' contrasting explanation of the differing way text is read as myth. Mythical texts are read, according to Barthes, as significations (so, a signifier and a signified; form and meaning), so as to express a so-called 'second signified.' According to Barthes' analysis, the text as sign is, in the case of mythology, turned by the reader-interpreter into a signifier. Together, *form* and *meaning* comprise a single entity that expresses a 'second' mythological meaning. Loughlin summarises Barthes' analysis as: 'Myth properly can only be read as one complete thing, in the conjunction of signifier, signified and signification.'<sup>100</sup> In this, Barthes' thesis harmonises with later neuroscientific research (see 2.3.3 (a) and n66). His thesis has implications for the reading of poems

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>100</sup> Gerard Loughlin, "Myths, Signs and Significations," *Theology* 89, no. 730 (1986): 273.

which are also structured as a spliced unity of form and meaning. It could likewise be transferable to John Paul's reading of the conjugal couple, where the two-as-one serve as sacramental sign of the 'second signification' of God's union with His people. It would seem to lend itself particularly well as a way to read the Judeo-Christian understanding of the human person as signifier of the signified, God (*imago Dei*).

### ***3.1.2 Scripture: interpreted encounters***

John Paul, following the gospel precedent, does not restrict himself to either the one or the other of the creation texts. He is mindful of the differences between them (TOB 2:2), noting the greater maturity of the Elohist or Priestly account of Genesis 1:1-2:4, which, while appearing first in the canonical order, is the more recent of the two texts. He does not, though, feel bound within the confines of a literary-historical methodology. John Paul relates to the texts as revelatory communication, disclosive of truth which will perforce have contemporary relevance.<sup>101</sup> John Paul's scriptural exegesis follows the approach of literary analysis rather than biblical studies. He freely probes the ancient texts which range across wide chronological terrain, inspecting closely the meanings and arrangements of the words in the expectation that such a reading will disclose truths. In the case of the Elohist text, rendered according to the formulae of Hebrew poetry, it seems an especially apt method; active investigation operative alongside active receptivity. It is a methodology that assumes the openness of the text, pausing for reflection and inviting further meditation, and so especially suited to the manner of its initial delivery by weekly instalments.

As well as assuming, firstly, the privileged status of canonical scripture as text, this literary-analytical methodology assumes the text to still be capable of disclosure to contemporary readers; to still *live*. This introduces the possibility that what is discerned in a text by a later reader may diverge from an earlier consensus of the text's meaning, where 'diverge'

---

<sup>101</sup> Cf. John Paul II's claim in TOB 2:5 of a parallel between his own attempt to 'penetrate' Genesis with the deliberations of the Synod of Bishops, then meeting, to discuss the same topic of familial relations. In TOB 3:1, he explicitly links 'deeper reflection on this [Yahwist creation] text' with modern concerns: 'we find there "*in nucleo*" almost all the elements of the analysis of man to which modern, and above all contemporary, philosophical anthropology is sensitive.'

is not necessarily synonymous with ‘contradict.’ If God’s Spirit is held to be present in an especial way within scripture, then grace is operative in an especial way in scripture and through such grace a reader may suddenly apprehend something not previously apprehended.<sup>102</sup> This leads to the second assumption: a certain philosophical understanding of language. To arrive at meaning, attention is paid not only to the words written, but, to use J. L. Austin’s terms, to ‘*the force*’ of the words, and to their intended ‘*effects*.’ The reader as well-intentioned interpreter enters into dialogue with the text, aiming to truthfully understand it.<sup>103</sup>

Graeme Marshall finds in late Wittgenstein a great help in articulating how it is that texts can disclose more of themselves the more they are read; an idea applicable not only to scriptural texts. The challenge comes from the text itself having remained constant – it is composed of the same words it always was – while the perspective from which it is *viewed* or read has changed and this change has allowed things previously unseen to become visible. Wittgenstein used the spatial analogy of ‘aspect perception’ to illuminate how concepts are fixed. Marshall expresses Wittgenstein’s insight as:

any particular thing has a manifold of aspects each of which presents the whole thing anew. The emphasis shifts from the properties a thing has [...] to what it increasingly is in all its aspects. Its properties are either obvious or to be discovered by proper investigation; its aspects are revelatory of the thing itself.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer identified grace as being the missing element in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s account of textual interpretation. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the 'Miracle' of Understanding," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 1 (2005): 31.

<sup>103</sup> The pope’s words here are supportive of, and supported by, the consensus of speech-act theorists that language is more than referential or representational; ‘action’ being the operative concept involved. Beyond the propositional content of any text is an energy or force. This last is an ‘excess’ that accounts for words in usage being more than signs or encoded thoughts. For a systematic account of the force of words, see J. L. Austin, J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisaá, *How to Do Things with Words : The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). For a summary of Austin’s approach, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of Covenant," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics (Carlisle, CMA; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Publishing; Zondervan, 2001), 1-49.

<sup>104</sup> Graeme Marshall, "The Problem of Religious Language 'Look at It This Way' (Wittgenstein)\*," *Sophia* 51, no. 4 (2012): 9.

This suggests that what is seen or valued in a text will alter according to the reader's point of view, depending on how the text '*presents*,' as, for example, in the perceptual puzzle known as 'Rubin's vase,' where viewer perception slips between seeing the vase as a positive shape or seeing it as negative space between the outlines of two facial profiles. Apprehending the different aspects expands understanding: 'new aspects, awareness of new relations, enrichment of meaning.'<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, in entering into dialogue with a text, if it is to be a true conversation, then the flow of interpretation will be two-way. A contemporary reader of an historic text does not exercise hegemony over it as if it were its sole interpreter; any current reading stands alongside and within, historic readings. By virtue of texts having been written, together with the readings of them that have accrued, the past and the present are both extant within a given text.<sup>106</sup> This constitutes one axis of critical enquiry. The other pertains to the unchanging text itself which interprets the reader and offers a critique of the historic present.<sup>107</sup> We enter into a text but that same text also enters into us. This is paradigmatically so when that text is scriptural; the Christian understanding being that scriptural words are perpetually animated by God, their ultimate author.

### ***3.1.3 Textual openness***

Texts vary in their capacity to support reader dialogue, depending on their degree of openness; variable according to the type of language used. Some language usage, especially that associated with specialisms, can be manipulated to close down third-party understanding and to obscure meaning; one part of Wendell Berry's thesis in his essay, "Standing by Words."<sup>108</sup> Commitment to textual openness is the operative hermeneutic argued for by Susannah Ticciati in her reading of the Book of Job. Ticciati offers a reversal of the usual assumption - that the book

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Roland Barthes: '[...] any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citations [...]'. Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 39.

<sup>107</sup> James Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 1 (2004): 62. Hanvey speaks of the 'convergence of horizons' in the *kairos* where past, present and future are present to each other.

<sup>108</sup> Wendell Berry, "Standing by Words," in *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983).

is seeking to deliver answers to the problem of evil - by arguing instead that it seeks to alter the way we ask questions about it (the rationale of poetry, according to Bruce Dawe. See 4.2.4 below). She argues, therefore, that the text is designed to be read and re-read in a dynamic interaction between text and interpretation, where the text is not 'shut down' upon having provided supposed answers, but is always open to re-reading and the possibility of revised or divergent interpretations; a methodology she implements, in her own reading of Job.<sup>109</sup>

The drawbacks of such openness to new possibilities or 'different ways of taking'<sup>110</sup> what the text presents, is that real efforts to engage with a text may only lead to a disheartening exegetical circle where knowledge is frustratingly elusive; textual interpretation diffuse and individualistic, prone to the idiosyncrasies and proclivities of any given reader, or group of readers, at any given time. The implication is that textual meaning is inherently unstable which could ultimately imply meaning's being decoupled from the words of the text; meaning subsumed into interpretation, a construct of the reader. Such an approach struggles to validate and uphold any one interpretation as normative and, *verso*, to identify and discard misreadings. The relativism of such interpretations would make it difficult to propose any universally-applicable truth-claim being present within the text; my truth may not be your truth.<sup>111</sup>

The accretion of interpretations can distract from a text, especially when the history of interpretation is long and varied. In cases of such distraction and/or confusion, a return to the primary text is called for. Perhaps that need is implicitly recognised by Jesus in His instruction to return to the 'beginning.' While it may not be possible to engage with a text in a state of interpretive amnesia, denuding the text of its history of reception, it is possible to suspend those memories so as to return to a text in a state of openness, prepared to be surprised. There is an operative

---

<sup>109</sup> Susannah Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity. Reading Beyond Barth* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2005).

<sup>110</sup> Marshall, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Resistance to the notion of a single, or paramount, truth is explicitly argued for by Roland Barthes: 'textual analysis impugns the idea of a final signified.' The relation between text and critic he posits as 'entering into the play of the signifiers [...] but not hierarchising them. Textual analysis is pluralist.' Barthes, 43.

tension, then, within scriptural texts whose meaning is to be regarded as stable throughout time, so providing continuity and connection, and the openness of that text, which can mean new perspectives and understandings being discerned. The benefit of textual openness, especially for communities that forge their identities upon texts deemed sacred, is that such texts can endlessly generate new insights as they come into contact with minds shaped by new disciplines, new social attitudes, and new contexts of living. The interpretative task becomes one of integrating this fresh insight so as to enrich extant readings without erasing them.<sup>112</sup> Textual openness means that scripture need not be only or primarily of historic interest; even though composed in a social context long since gone, it can continue to provide fresh insights and applications for contemporaries.

### ***3.1.4 Imago Dei***

One of the most striking instances of John Paul's re-reading disclosing a new insight, or a different way of taking the text, concerns his interpretation of the *imago Dei*. The term has eluded precise definition or theological consensus as to its meaning. It not only situates mankind in a special, privileged position *vis-à-vis* the rest of creation, but distinctively defines him through his relation to God, from whom and through whom he was created, in order that God may share His super-abundant life with others. The specifics of the content of *image* are not elaborated in scripture. Arriving at an understanding of what it means involves extrapolating from what scripture says of God, to what this would mean for His image. This method rests upon the Bible's being understood as God's self-revelation and therefore its not being a text just like any other. In his Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*,<sup>113</sup> John Paul discusses the link between man's resemblance to God, and the anthropomorphic language and concepts used of God in the Bible.

---

<sup>112</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is mindful that biblical exegetical models of any given period follow the dominant thought-patterns of their time. The church's discernment is to identify and remove 'contemporary ideology' in order to arrive at the truth, and conversely, to measure any interpretation against its compatibility with what he calls 'the base memory of the Church.' Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 19-20.

<sup>113</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, (1988), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html). Apostolic Letter.

This language is not an obstacle but a facilitator: if man resembles God in some way, then God can in some way be humanly known. If man resembles God in some important way, the reverse is also the case: the Original in some sense resembles the likeness. Within the concept of *likeness* is a sense of its own limitation where the analogy reaches its own boundary, allowing for the ways in which God is incomprehensibly Other, or *unlike* man.<sup>114</sup> This is particularly pertinent concerning ‘comparisons that attribute to God “masculine” or “feminine” qualities.’<sup>115</sup> The divine image has historically been seen variously as inhering in a substantive quality that manifests the image, such as spirit; a functional quality, such as authoritative leadership; or creaturely relationality (where the focus is not upon having the capacity for relationships, but being within them from the moment of conception).

While Genesis 1 confirms man as a creature within the visible world, s/he occupies a heightened position as it were ‘above’ the world (cf. TOB 2:3). On this account, man’s similarity to God (*imago Dei*), which constitutes that which s/he is, affirms ‘the absolute impossibility of reducing man to the “world”’ (TOB 2:4). John Paul is motivated to defend man from any conceptual scheme that would relegate him as, for instance, only a high-order animal: ‘man can neither be understood nor explained in his full depth with the categories taken from the ‘ “world”, that is, from the visible totality of bodies’ (TOB 2:4). John Paul shifts the emphasis from seeing human domination of the world (cf. Gen. 1:28) as the marker of the divine image to inalienable human dignity and the moral imperative to safeguard it (as was affirmed at Vatican II in *Gaudium et spes* 12). Avoiding any taint of sexual hierarchy, such as reservation of the *imago Dei* as primarily man’s over woman’s, John Paul sees man in his personhood imaging God precisely ‘inasmuch as he is male and female’ (TOB 9:3). The nature of the image is one of unity in diversity where the *esse* of each of the persons is differentiated, a given, and of the nature of the person, not a role or an

---

<sup>114</sup> CCC, 370 states ‘in no way is God in man’s image [...] But the respective “perfections” of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband.’

<sup>115</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §8.

adjunct to the person. As far as persons, male and female, image God, they exist together in symbiotic harmony.

Carefully restating the equality of the man and the woman before God, John Paul draws also upon the concept of relationality as imaging God. John Paul deduces from the two Genesis texts ‘that *man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons*, which man and woman form from the very beginning’ (TOB 9:3). This focuses upon dynamism rather than the *stasis* implied with substantive accounts. While the rationale for seeing dynamic relationality as imaging God appears to draw upon Trinitarian theology, the words of Genesis contain under-articulated hints of a differentiated unity in God,<sup>116</sup> opening the way for the very much later articulation of the Trinity (TOB 9:3). In John Paul’s reading, inter-personal communion is not just one manifestation among a number of what constitutes the divine image but is the bedrock of the image; ‘the very bone marrow’ (TOB 9:4) of what it is to be human: ‘*reciprocal enrichment*’ (TOB 9:5).<sup>117</sup>

The *imago Dei* can be summarized in the term, ‘person’: that which constitutes man as a distinctive, and superlative, creature. Personhood is constituted by the subject’s unity of the spiritual, physical, social, and historical dimensions.<sup>118</sup> The person is a free agent with moral responsibility for him/herself, and is a relational, that is, social, being with the capacity to give and receive love. Persons realize their personhood in relations of love with others, and long for such relations. Reciprocal self-giving *for* another finds fullest corporeal expression within marriage, the paradigmatic sign and instantiation of which is sexual union. While John Paul II does highlight

---

<sup>116</sup> In Genesis 1 evening and morning form one day and in Genesis 2:24 man and woman become one flesh. Each of the singularities contains two components. Joseph Atkinson, "The Experience of the Body and the Divine: A Scriptural Perspective," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37, no. 2 (2010): 320.

<sup>117</sup> John Paul's emphasis on reciprocity within the complementarity of male-female relations has been found to contrast favourably with the hierarchical understandings of Barth and Balthasar. Agneta Sutton, "The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and John Paul II," *New Blackfriars* 87, no. 1010 (2006).

<sup>118</sup> International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, (2004), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040723\\_comm\\_union-stewardship\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_comm_union-stewardship_en.html) §9.



the particular depth of spousal sexual union as manifesting the image of God, he does not claim it to be the only such manifestation. Each single person images God as each has a capacity and desire to love and be loved and each exists within a matrix of relations. John Paul II devotes much energy to explicating how the longing to love can lead some, including himself, to forego marriage and all sexual relations in virginity and/or celibacy (cf. TOB 73-85) in order to be available to respond to the needs of a wider range and number of persons. Further, while the gift of self can be properly manifest in spousal sexual relations, the gift of self is not simply equate-able with such relations. In Genesis 1, ‘*adam* is the divine image of God in his responsibility to obey God, to imitate him, and to worship him.’<sup>119</sup> The spousal relationship provides a coherent context for responding to the blessing-command to multiply the divine image. Response to the command is both an imitation of, and participation in, God’s free, loving, creative act. John Paul’s distinctive contribution to theological anthropology is to see in marital sexual union<sup>120</sup> a strongly revelatory manifestation of the *imago Dei*. John Paul recognizes that he is, in effect, proposing ‘a theology of sex’ (TOB 9:5).

### ***3.1.5 Criticism of John Paul’s reading of scripture and the imago Dei***

One critic of John Paul’s theological anthropology is Gerard Loughlin. His 2012 essay, ‘Nuptial Mysteries,’ criticizes the pope on the grounds of introducing novelty into the concept of the *imago Dei*, and owing to that novelty, excluding some categories of people from the concept.<sup>121</sup> Much in Loughlin’s argument relies upon his reading of the Genesis creation stories and his handling of metaphor. His critical engagement with John Paul II’s theology illuminates their differing methodologies as readers of scriptural text.

---

<sup>119</sup> Francis Martin, "Male and Female He Created Them: A Summary of the Teaching of Genesis Chapter One," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (1993): 249.

<sup>120</sup> John Paul most often uses the expression, ‘conjugal act.’ Waldstein explains that the term is not a euphemism but is intended to indicate ‘sex in its full moral nature and goodness as a personal act in the determinate circumstances of conjugal life.’ Waldstein, index: conjugal act.

<sup>121</sup> Gerard Loughlin, "Nuptial Mysteries," in *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology in Honour of Fergus Kerr, OP*, ed. S. Oliver, K. Kilby, and T. O’Loughlin (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

Loughlin says that the pope's *Theology of the Body* amounted to an 'anthropology of nuptiality.'<sup>122</sup> While neither the term, *nuptial mystery*, nor the word, *nuptial*, appear in Waldstein's translation, the concept is central to John Paul's seeing spousal union as a metaphoric sign for the unity and totality of divine revelation.<sup>123</sup> Loughlin claims to share with Fergus Kerr a concern that the principle of nuptiality as applied to the *imago Dei* is a novelty that breaks with tradition.<sup>124</sup> This is only true in part. John Paul's comfort with, and appreciation of, the fullness of human bodiliness, including its sexual dimension, contrasts with some of the early church fathers, several of whom Loughlin cites in a footnote.<sup>125</sup> Loughlin's choice, though, is partial, as other early church theologians, such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa saw licit sexual expression as analogical of the ecstatic mutual love within the Godhead.<sup>126</sup> Later mystics, St Bernard of Clairvaux and St John of the Cross, found the biblical nuptial trope of Israel-Church as the bride of Christ a rich resource for theological reflection. John Paul was not introducing a new principle of nuptiality but was more fully elaborating something already present within scripture and the tradition.

Aside from the charge of introducing novelty to the concept of the *imago Dei*, Loughlin objects to the inclusion of spousal sexual relations because those relations are exclusively heterosexual. The implication, according to Loughlin, is that those who do not engage in such relations, such as homosexuals, are not fully human.<sup>127</sup> It is not the case, though, that John Paul was suggesting that spousal sexual relations are mandatory if one is to fully image God. If this were so, then Loughlin's objection would have merit, as substantial tranches of humankind would be excluded, such as the old, the infirm, children, and consecrated religious, which is clearly not the pope's intention. John Paul argues, though, for the equal and inalienable dignity of all humans, irrespective

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>123</sup> Angelo Scola notes that 'the expression "nuptiality" refers in the first instance to the relationship between the man and the woman.' Later development in theological thinking transfers the concept, applying it metaphorically to 'the "sacred marriage" between heaven and earth to the Judeo-Christian theme of the nuptial relationship between Yahweh and his people [...].' Angelo Scola, "The Nuptial Mystery at the Heart of the Church," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 4 (1998): 631.

<sup>124</sup> Loughlin, "Nuptial Mysteries," 174-78.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 176, n14.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Sarah Coakley, "Creaturehood before God," *Theology* 93, no. 755 (1990): 344.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Loughlin, "Nuptial Mysteries," 177.

of their state or condition of life. John Paul also extrapolates from the creation text a principle of ‘priority of the *soma*,’ that is, that, prior to sexual differentiation, man possesses his especial dignity: ‘the fact that man is a “body” belongs more deeply to the structure of the personal subject than the fact that in his somatic constitution he is also male or female’ (TOB 8:1). This principle importantly allows for the inclusion of any person who has indeterminate sex.

Loughlin also finds it a ‘heavy reading’<sup>128</sup> for John Paul to have interpreted the Genesis text as giving an account of ‘the inauguration of matrimony.’<sup>129</sup> John Paul means by *marriage* the unique relationship formed between the man and the woman ‘in the beginning.’ This relationship, a *communio personarum*,<sup>130</sup> had been intended and inaugurated by God since the foundation of the world. It pertains when the male and female are in their natural state and predates the foundation of any social order. A communion of persons, in the sense of companionship, is also formed in other relationships, both familial and non-familial. It is most fully and uniquely expressed in the unity of the married couple which is the paradigmatic metaphor by which to gain epistemic access to certain qualities of God. The relational nature of the intra-Trinitarian life grounds the spousal analogy.

Loughlin is further disturbed by what he sees as an over-reach of the nuptial metaphor within the teaching of the Magisterium. Specifically, he criticises a 2004 letter to bishops issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) while under the prefecture of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, during the papacy of John Paul II.<sup>131</sup> The final paragraph of section nine refers to the bridal and covenant metaphors as being, ‘more than simple metaphors’ and that the bridal symbolism is ‘indispensable for understanding the way in which God loves his people,’ it is also one ‘[a]mong the many ways in which God reveals himself to his people.’ The letter makes a strong claim for these

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>130</sup> This term, *communio personarum*, was used to describe the union of the first man and woman in *Gaudium et spes* 12. John Paul II adopts the term, explicitly stating that ‘The function of the image is that of mirroring the one who is the model, of reproducing its own prototype. Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion’ (TOB 9:3).

<sup>131</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World, (2004), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040731\\_collaboration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html)

well-established metaphors, claiming that the relation established between the terms (Christ and Church; God and people of God) is in some sense interior to the nature of the relationship; that what each metaphor expresses is unavailable using any other analogy. Loughlin's critical focus is directed to the bridal analogy, disregarding the legal analogy.

In his Apostolic Letter of 1988, *Mulieris dignitatem*, John Paul II notes that biblical bridal imagery is analogical, and that 'analogy implies a likeness, while at the same time leaving ample room for non-likeness' (*MD* 25). The *bride*, whether the people of Israel (cf. Is. 54:5) or the church (cf. Eph. 5:27), is a collective noun that foregrounds the community (which could be as extensive as the whole of humanity), as the one whom God will *marry*. Loughlin acknowledges as much in a footnote.<sup>132</sup> A collective noun refers to a group who, by virtue of sharing a characteristic, are referred to as a single entity. Obedient-faith-in-Christ is the characteristic shared by those denoted *bride* of Christ, which binds them together as a single entity and allows the many to be considered as one. The principle of a collective noun is unity, not multiplicity, hence its governing a singular, not a plural, verb.

Loughlin's reading side-steps this principle of singularity, focusing instead on the many who comprise the bride, which leads him to misconstrue the nature of the relationship between Christ and the Church as 'polygamous and bisexual.'<sup>133</sup> For the purposes of the bridal analogy, sex is a relevant characteristic in as far as it signifies the unique nature of the spousal relationship, drawing into unity a differentiated two whose union changes their ontological status and may result in the births of others. The analogy between the *marriage* of Christ and the church and human marriage between a man and a woman is founded upon the principle of one party taking on what he or she is not, without losing that which her or she is, just as, in like fashion, the incarnated Word took on what He was not (man), without losing what He was (divine).<sup>134</sup> For the purposes of *bride* used as a collective noun, the salient feature is faithful obedience, not sex distinction. Loughlin misses the

---

<sup>132</sup> Loughlin, "Nuptial Mysteries," 183 n46.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas Norris, "Mariology a Key to the Faith," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1989): 195.

relations between metaphoric terms, *bride* and *Christ*. Meaning in metaphor is relational, derived positively from the connection between terms, but also negatively, from operative constraints and it is these latter that his reading trespasses against. Loughlin's is an errant reading which violates the integrity of the bridal analogy. Polygamy is contrary to 'equal personal dignity of men and women' and radically contradicts the nature of the spousal relation<sup>135</sup> which is unique and exclusive.

Loughlin rejects sexual complementarity as one of the features transferred into the biblical use of the spousal analogy on the contestable ground that only sexual sameness can afford relational equality. In rejecting the unity of the two modalities, male and female, Loughlin effectively advocates an entrenched and unbridgeable sexual binary. He claims that same-sex couples of their nature avoid sexual dependency, which he construes only in terms of female dependency on the male. The reasoning for this is based on the assertion that marriage across time and culture has been a partnership between those coded as social equals. As women tend to be construed as the social inferiors of men, this prejudices their possibility of equality within a heterosexual marriage. The alternative, same-sex marriage, links those who occupy the same sexually-determined social stratum; a proposal which effectively advocates trenchant social immobility. *Spouse* in this scheme is a socially-constructed abstraction rather than a person, so depersonalising the most personal of relationships. De-personalising marital union does not, as Loughlin hopes, expand the concept, but nullifies it, as any relation is only intelligible by reference to those persons who are in relation.

Loughlin's reading of the Genesis stories contrasts unfavourably with that of John Paul II. Loughlin's ambivalence towards the biblical spousal analogy leads him to give an unsatisfactory reading. He selectively retrieves from the spousal analogy its features of social endorsement, intimacy, sexual expression, and generation while rejecting the principle of unity-within-diversity and the necessity of that to procreate. That same-sex couples have no organic

---

<sup>135</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*: On the Role of the Christian Family, (1981), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html). Apostolic Exhortation. §19.

possibility of generating issue is glossed over by Loughlin who makes the disingenuous claim that ‘same-sex couples can have children by many of the same means as employed by other-sex couples.’<sup>136</sup> Yet, as Loughlin himself has to allow, all persons ‘are the children of mothers,’<sup>137</sup> and so ethical considerations pertain to any artificial reproductive method that makes use of a woman’s procreative potential in a way reductively materialistic, whether through egg sourcing or using her as a gestational surrogate. Loughlin’s silence undoes his professed concern that women be treated as equals, rendering him instead, guilty of treating women as being both ‘needed and not needed’; the very criticism he had levied against the 2004 *Letter to Bishops*.

### 3.2 Original Solitude

John Paul identifies within the Genesis creation texts three original states which determine man’s condition: solitude, unity, and nakedness without shame. The concept of original solitude is introduced early in his catechesis (TOB 5:1) with thirty-two entries in total.<sup>138</sup> The pope reads man’s solitude before God as having two meanings: ‘*one deriving from man’s very nature*, that is, from his humanity [...] and *the other deriving from the relationship between male and female*’ (TOB 5:2). In the earlier Yahwist story of Genesis 2, man experiences himself as in some sense alone within abundant creation. Man’s consciousness<sup>139</sup> of his difference is marked and confirmed by his being the only creature capable of cultivating the land (cf. Gen. 2:5). This is an inter-textual link to Genesis 1:28 where man was mandated by God to ‘fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over’ all living creatures. As intentional transformation of the land is a specifically human activity, and as God enjoined man to work the land, this capacity for work is part of the meaning of his own bodiliness (TOB 6:4).

Man comes to knowledge of his own solitude when carrying out his first divine task: naming the other creatures (Gen. 2:19). John Paul sees this task as one amounting to a ‘test’ by

---

<sup>136</sup> Loughlin, "Nuptial Mysteries," 191.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>138</sup> Waldstein, index: Original solitude.

<sup>139</sup> *Man* is here to be understood as *human* rather than as *male*. The first man is only defined as male after the woman is created (Gen. 2:21-22). See TOB 5:2.

God (cf. TOB 5:4) as it takes place after the conditions of the covenant have been set; that is, that he will till and keep the garden and forbear to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:15-17). Man passes this test as he realises through the knowledge he gains of the animals that he differs from them all in a profound way. The task of naming the animals functions as a means by which man is guided towards self-knowledge (TOB 5:6). Confirmation that he was learning correctly is marked by God's accepting the names the man gives; names which, it is inferred, indicate each animal's '*specific "differentia"*' (TOB 5:6). It is in gaining knowledge of the world of creatures man learns that there is no creature like himself. This consciousness of his difference is detectable visibly.<sup>140</sup> Although the biblical text does not explicitly speak of man's body, it is 'precisely as a body among bodies' (TOB 6:3) that man arrives at his own self-definition; that he is '*a person with the subjectivity characterizing the person*' (TOB 6:1).

Through God's provision of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,' man is granted the status of subject. He exists within the covenant whose conditions are set by God. Up until the setting of the covenant conditions, man had been only the object of God's creative act; now he is a subject who can exercise his subjectivity via his free choice. The covenant establishes the limits of man; his dependence upon his Creator and the submission that is proper to that relationship (TOB 6:2). The hierarchy within creation where man is above other creatures, but subject to God, is the very opposite of oppressive. Mankind is a subject constituted 'according to the measure of "partner of the Absolute", inasmuch as he must consciously discern and choose between good and evil, between life and death' (TOB 6:2). By virtue of the covenant, man faces the possibility of a 'dimension of solitude that was unknown to him up to this point' (TOB 7:3).

---

<sup>140</sup> In her discussion of feminist 'standpoint epistemology,' Lucy Tatman cites Donna Haraway's influential 1988 essay, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1998). Haraway focuses on vision as that which is 'situated' and 'partial' and questions the use of seeing as a metaphor for knowing. As vision relies upon the viewer seeing from a particular location, viewing becomes linked to political considerations; of one's 'power to see.' Lucy Tatman, *Knowledge That Matters: A Feminist Theological Paradigm and Epistemology*, Studies in Theology and Sexuality 6 (London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 115. In the Genesis account of the beginning, the primordial man is the first and only of his species, so free from politically-situated seeing. There are as yet no others whose vision may differ from his own. The man's vision, and so knowledge, in the Genesis context, is therefore to be read as authentic, leading him to truths about himself, and the world in which he lives.

His solitude, which has been experienced within his constitutive framework of communion with God, can become solitude of a different order where all communion with God ceases: death. The forbidden fruit of the tree, if eaten, will introduce this radical breach. Man has already learnt that he can, by virtue of the structure of his body, ‘*be the author of genuinely human activity*’ (TOB 7:2). The possibility of choosing ‘not-God’ is open to man. Embodied man is a person not only self-conscious but self-determinative.

### ***3.2.1 Original solitude reprised: The Virgin Mary***

*Solitude* as a characteristic applicable to Mary has received criticism from some feminist theologians. As the title of her 1976 book, *Alone of All Her Sex*, indicates, Marina Warner sees Mary as an isolated figure whose very isolation keeps her from being a serviceable role model for contemporary women. Because Mary’s predicates are superlatives, Warner argues that ‘in the very celebration of the perfect human woman, both humanity and women were subtly denigrated.’<sup>141</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth A. Johnson is motivated by a feminist hermeneutic in her 2006 book, *Truly Our Sister*. Johnson, like Warner, is committed to a rebalancing of Marian tropes so that she ceases to appear as ‘feminine perfection personified.’<sup>142</sup> Johnson focuses instead upon Mary as disciple who is on her own pilgrimage of faith. As ‘sister’ she relates in a non-hierarchical scheme within a structure of equality. For such a Mary, her modes of relation to others are those of association, partnership and friendship. Warner and Johnson are intent on reclaiming the horizontal axis of the Mary figure as an essential balance to the vertical axis which had dominated her veneration in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Johnson could be seen as extending the work begun at Vatican II concerning Mary’s place within the church. While the final chapter of Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*<sup>143</sup> which deals with Mary, retains exalted language, such as ‘the

---

<sup>141</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage, 1976; repr., 1983), xxi.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>143</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)



splendour of an entirely unique holiness,<sup>144</sup> there is an explicit effort to balance the tropes used of her, so the mother is also the ‘daughter,’<sup>145</sup> and fellow sojourner who ‘advanced in her pilgrimage of faith.’<sup>146</sup> While ‘pre-eminent’ and ‘wholly unique,’<sup>147</sup> she is ‘also closest to us.’<sup>148</sup> While Johnson herself endorses such a redressing of the balance, she remains critical of what she sees as the ‘gender-inflected notions of masculine and feminine’<sup>149</sup> which she deems characteristic of the conciliar texts, such as *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

The solitude of Mary, object of veneration, and so exalted as to exist in splendid isolation, is exactly what troubles Warner and Johnson. While Marian tropes can be reassessed and supplemented by others that resonate more readily in the contemporary world, Mary’s solitude can also be examined in the light of John Paul II’s discussion of man’s original solitude. Adam’s constitutive solitude, experienced in his body, provoked within him a reflective self-awareness. In a reprise of the Adamic solitude, Mary at the Annunciation exhibits similar body-consciousness having heard from the angel that she will conceive and bear a son. Aware of her own virginal body, she asks how that could be.

While the invitation to assent to the impossible-made-possible by God<sup>150</sup> was specifically Mary’s, this *solitude* of experience will not remain absolute as at her son’s resurrection, all will be similarly invited to assent to the impossible-made-possible by God. Marian solitude will not only, in a sense, be shared, it is also necessary in terms of the figural work it does within the meta-narrative of the salvation story. The grammar of the Annunciation parallels that of the primordial beginning. Mary is aware of her difference (a betrothed virgin); is given a particular task to do (conceive and bear a son); has a distinguishing quality which especially suits her for this

---

<sup>144</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

<sup>145</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

<sup>146</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

<sup>147</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

<sup>148</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 54.

<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 66.

<sup>150</sup> This is explored as a theme of the Annunciation by Jean-Luc Marion, which is developed by Rose Ellen Dunn, "Let It Be: Finding Grace with God through the *Gelassenheit* of the Annunciation," in *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, ed. Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

task ('Full of grace'), and exercises her free choice in assent ('May it be done to me according to Your word'). The primeval man of Genesis becomes aware of his difference (being man, not beast); is given a particular task (to act as God's deputy, filling the earth and subduing it, cf. Gen. 1: 28); has a distinguishing quality that fits him for the task (being the *imago Dei*, that is, being 'full of grace'), and was free to assent or decline (through the boundary presence of the forbidden tree). The Annunciation can therefore be read as a recapitulation of man's creation in Genesis 2:7. The newly-created *man* is realised anew at the Annunciation where the modality is not man in his maleness but in his femaleness, as *woman*. Mary at the Annunciation is figured not only as the new Eve, but as the new Adam.

Likewise, while the superlative dogmatic titles by which Mary is known in the church: 'Mother of God' and 'Immaculate Conception,' and her honorific devotional titles such as 'Queen of Heaven,' do focus upon her elevated solitude, they have their roots in the primordial condition of man before the breaking of the covenant. Humans were the only creatures able to worship God and the only ones able to receive the direct address of God. Mary manifests the divinely-intended image of God, constituted according to the original measure which was "*partner of the Absolute*".' According to this understanding, she is not removed from ordinary experience, except in as far as what now constitutes ordinary experience is removed from the original divine intention and realisation. Realising authentic personhood remains a possibility by assenting to each invitation to grace. In those assents, the human becomes recognizably a suitable *help* for God; one who is so manifestly similar as to be that God's *image*.

Understood in this way, Mary's solitude is not problematic in the sense of her being unattainably or unrealistically superior to every other woman, or every other person. Her solitude of realised personhood acts in two ways. It reiteratively enacts 'man's "theological prehistory"' (TOB 18:3) which was a state of original innocence, when primeval man lived in a state of trust and communion with God and the world, and extends forwards to the eschatological future when, it is hoped, full communion with God will be consciously enjoyed in the final consummation of history. Mary is the realised possibility and guarantee that full personhood is possible for an

exclusively human creature. Mary's solitude reprises and exceeds the original solitude of humankind: she alone is 'Full of grace' and she alone is the virgin who will conceive and give birth. In Mary, the '*unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable relationship with God*' (TOB 6:2), which distinguished the first male and female is now fully operative in her. Mary's solitude is of a type that constitutes the realised human capacity to be what God intends. She intentionally lives her life in alignment with God's plan for the human and, in doing so, becomes the creaturely first-fruit of the new creation; the perfect image of God. She will only be alone until her spiritual fecundity multiplies.

### 3.3 Unity and Communion

Man's original unity is understood in two ways in the Genesis texts: the unity of person as a spirit-infused body, and the unity of man male and female. The unity of male and female 'overcomes the frontier of solitude' (TOB 9:2) while also affirming all that constituted man in his solitude: self-consciousness of his distinction and a desire to transcend his solitude, called by John Paul 'opening toward and waiting for a "communion of persons"' (TOB 9:2). This personal communion is a key dimension of the value expressed in God's assessment of all that He made: that it was 'very good' (Gen. 1:31). Created by God, man has innate value before his Creator, and a value for himself by virtue of being man. This value expands when the man is given the possibility of transcending himself in love for the woman; each one living 'for' the other (TOB 9:1).

The chronologically earlier creation text, the Yahwist, deals with the separate creation of woman (Gen. 2:21-22). For contemporary readers, this poses a more contentious account of man's origins as the woman is formed after the creation of man. As the man's solitude was deemed by God to be 'not good'<sup>151</sup> the woman's subsequent appearance can seem to suggest that she is the answer to the lonely man. If this is so, it would disastrously diminish her dignity as she would not be a subject desired in her own right, but only for how she could complete the

---

<sup>151</sup> The serpent deceives Eve when she is alone, insinuating himself between God and humanity, and between man and woman. He is the infiltrator, splitting the unity of the two/s.

man.<sup>152</sup> John Paul's reading rejects reducing the woman in such a way. Starting from the proviso that the Genesis language is mythical, 'an archaic way of expressing a deeper content' (TOB 8:2), John Paul sees in the Yahwist creation text the unfolding psycho-drama of man's origin formulated as a dialogue between the human and the Creator. The human begins life as an earthling, created from the dust of the ground, and is only at another stage created as male and female: 'Creation takes place simultaneously, as it were, in two dimensions: the action of God-Yahweh, who creates, unfolds in correlation with the process of human consciousness.' (TOB 8:2). That is, primordial, sexually undifferentiated man first learns about himself in relation to God and then in relation to the other creatures whom he resembles in having a body, but whom he exceeds in his personhood. Once he has formulated an interior understanding of himself as one longing for creaturely communion, he is induced into a 'sleep' which John Paul explicitly distances from any Freudian interpretation. John Paul sees the biblical author having a theological intention to express 'the *exclusiveness of God's action* in the creation of woman.' Not only did the man have no conscious part in the woman's creation, his 'sleep' is analogous to 'a specific return to non-being' or 'to the moment before creation, *in order that the solitary "man" may by God's creative initiative reemerge from that moment in his double unity as male and female*' (TOB 8:3).

Although there is now sexual difference, John Paul sees the textual stress as falling upon the homogeneity of the two: *She*, like Adam, is a subject or *I* 'which is also personal and equally related to the situation of original solitude' (TOB 8:3). It is the homogeneity which is recognised with delight when Adam awakes and first sees the woman. She resembles the man in such a way that her sameness of being, but difference in body, is immediately apparent. Theirs is a complementary similarity better thought of as 'exact correspondence' (TOB 8:4 n16). Helen Kraus' exploration of gender issues in the first four chapters of Genesis endorses this reading. She points to the woman and man sharing the same substance, rendered in the text as the woman having been formed from the same living tissue as comprised the man, and of the couple as

---

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Loughlin, "Nuptial Mysteries," 183.

therefore being '[c]loser than any other pair of creatures.'<sup>153</sup> Kraus also points out that the woman did not require a second infusion of divine breath in order to live.<sup>154</sup> That which enlivens them is the same spirit of the same God. The male's joyful recognition of the female, 'flesh from my flesh and bone from my bones' (Gen. 2:23), expresses their unity as the foundational bedrock; the basis upon which to understand their somatic differences. 'Bone', synecdochic for *being* and *flesh*, signifies a sharing of the same personhood detectable through the differing physical characteristics.<sup>155</sup> It is the humanity of the woman which is recognised and responded to even before her femininity. The two are consubstantial and this grounds their difference. John Paul's avowal of the deep equality of the created subjects is redolent of a feminist hermeneutic. *Woman* here is not derivative or secondary to man-the-male, nor that which completes his privation. The human person is read as 'two "incarnations" of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world – *two reciprocally completing ways of "being a body" and at the same time of being human*' (TOB 10:1). Again, Kraus endorses this reading of the Hebrew text: that the woman is neither inferior nor derivative; rather, man and woman are consubstantial and so equal. It is only when the man knows that he has a perfect companion that he speaks for the first time. He can now hear and be heard; understand and be understood. He now has a 'dialogue partner.'<sup>156</sup>

Within freely-assented to spousal sexual union where 'the two will be one flesh' (Gen. 2:24),<sup>157</sup> there is an affirmation of the unity expressed by the exclamation of 'flesh from my flesh'. Kraus notes that the sexual union of Genesis 2:24 describes their commitment to each other first, and that this takes priority over progeny.<sup>158</sup> This unity is one that '*derives from a choice*' ('a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife') and presupposes a mature consciousness of one's own body and its meaning which is now one of '*reciprocal enrichment*'

---

<sup>153</sup> Helen Kraus, *Gender Issues in Ancient and Reformation Translations of Genesis 1-4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 25 n15.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 26. Kraus notes that 'those languages that distinguish between woman and wife (Latin and English), here use the latter matrimonial form.'

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 26 n55.

(TOB 9:4). It is through this consciousness that ‘humanity forms itself anew as a communion of persons’ which John Paul suggests constitutes a layer ‘deeper than the somatic structure as male and female’ (TOB 9:5). Spousal unity rests on the foundation of man’s original solitude, structured according to his self-determination and self-consciousness (TOB 10:4) and is situated within the context of the ‘communion of persons.’ Spousal sexual union expresses man’s surpassing of the limit of his solitude and ‘This surpassing always implies [...] one takes upon oneself the solitude of the body of the second “I” as one’s own’ (TOB 10:2).

### ***3.3.1 The priority of the soma***

Man’s realisation of his solitude in the Genesis 2 account precedes sexual differentiation and John Paul sees in this the priority of the body as such; that being a body ‘*belongs more deeply to the structure of the personal subject than the fact that in his somatic constitution he is also male or female*’. For this reason, the meaning of original solitude [...] is substantially prior to the meaning of original unity’ (TOB 8:1). Being human is prior to being male or female; ‘Bodiliness and sexuality are not simply identical’ (TOB 8:1). The *soma* is the manifestation of human personhood, as distinct from *sarx* (flesh). John Paul affirms the dignity of every human body, owing to its personhood. This complete correlation of dignity with humanity includes those with chromosomal and/or hormonal abnormalities which render their biological sexual characteristics ambiguous or indeterminate. The priority of the *soma* also releases space for those whose bodies do not conform to normative sexual differentiation, such as the inter-sexed. To construe human bodiliness as a value deeper than that of sexual differentiation is to provide space for those whose sexual identity is ambiguous. It means that to be male or female is to experience the body in one or other particular modality but that if this modality is indeterminate or damaged, that body is still expressive of human personhood. The priority of the undifferentiated body seems to have eschatological significance according to the words of the Matthean Jesus: ‘For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage’ (Mt. 22:30), suggesting sexual differentiation, although ‘constitutive for the person’ (TOB 10:1) in this earthly life, may be ultimately provisional.

### ***3.3.2 Virginity as a sign of unity***

The Virgin Mary seems to fit into the pope's exegetical scheme only within the structure of the original unity of the body-person, apparently disqualified from the unity of persons owing to her perpetual virginity. John Paul, though, understands spousal unity as inclusive of the virginal state; a theme he elaborated in seven Wednesday audiences throughout July and August 1996, a period outside the TOB catecheses. It is as virgin that Mary is asked to consent to the divine initiative. Her *fiat* is the freely-given consent of her whole person. In 'the conjugal act' where two become one flesh, each put their humanity 'under the blessing of fruitfulness' (TOB 10:1). Mary at the Annunciation acts in union with the creative Spirit of God which operates within the context of her on-going, personal communion with the Godhead through her personal commitment to her inherited religious tradition. She hears the call of God and in saying 'Yes' is effecting that to which she consented in the same way as a betrothed couple become married upon speaking their vows to each other. As with the priestly words of Eucharistic consecration, Mary's words 'make a new reality out of an old reality'<sup>159</sup>: the virgin is now *married* to the will of God. The structural similarity between spousal coitus and the Annunciation-Conception event is recognised and given poetic expression in Noel Rowe's poem of the Annunciation, discussed below (4.4.2). When Mary speaks forth her word, it issues forth in realised fecundity so paralleling and exemplifying the structure of the original expressive creation as written in the Elohist narrative; Mary's utterance fully images, in its earthly modality, God's own.

## **3.4 Nakedness without shame**

### ***3.4.1 Purity of vision***

John Paul's analysis of Genesis 2:25 concerning the mutual vision of the man and the woman in a state of original innocence, ties their way of perceiving or *seeing* the other to God's beholding His creation and 'seeing' that it was very good (Gen. 1:31). This vision encompasses

---

<sup>159</sup> Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 254.

and exceeds the surface data perceived by the eyes. It includes all that constitutes creation, including that which is hidden from eye-sight. This comprehensive vision is only discernible by those 'pure' of heart. The mutual gaze of man and woman who saw each other naked but were not made fearfully self-conscious, indicates they are in a state of such purity; that the body as yet 'does not contain an inner break and antithesis between what is spiritual and what is sensible' (TOB 13:1) and also that there is no cleft between the personhood of the subject and all that distinguishes the subject's body as sexual. That all this is discernible in the 'concise, and at the same time suggestive' (TOB 13:1) formulation of Genesis 2:25 implies a poetic language register.

### ***3.4.2 Shame in Genesis 2:25 and 3:17***

Genesis 2:25 has the woman and the man beholding each other in their reciprocal nakedness 'but they did not feel shame' while Genesis 3:7 has them realising they were naked and making coverings for themselves. John Paul draws attention to Genesis 2:25 being a unique reference to nakedness without shame, in contrast to the numerous other biblical texts which link nakedness to abjection, dishonour and loss of dignity (TOB 16:3, n27). In the textual lead-up to Genesis 2:25, 'man' has displayed a personal subjectivity that is expressed as a consciousness of his distinctive personhood which he experiences through his body. When in Genesis 2:25 he experiences his body as sexually distinctive, whether female or male, he feels no shame. This is not because each did not recognise or 'know' that they were naked (TOB 11:5). On the contrary, their nakedness was reciprocally beheld as a source of joy. It is only after having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they 'then' become ashamed of their nakedness before each other. There has been a shift, the new situation they are now in bringing with it 'a new content and a new quality of the experience of the body' (TOB 11:4). For this reason, John Paul identifies shame as a 'boundary' or 'threshold' experience. (TOB 11:4-5). The trespass of the boundary put in place by God has not been eradicated but has multiplied with 'nakedness' and 'shame' now operating as new boundaries.

In order to more fully probe what is indicated by this crucial shift in bodily meaning, John Paul devotes one of his audiences (TOB 12) to trying to reconstruct the meaning of



original nakedness. Original nakedness he has already spoken of as constituting the ‘proximate context’ of ‘the unity of the human being as male and female’ (TOB 11:6). He sees in this nakedness two dimensions. In the outward visibility of nakedness, the body becomes the mediator of man’s realising his own humanity as that which is distinct from the animals (so, of his solitude) and of that which mediates personal communion (so, of his unity). Because man participates in the world which is perceived and registered by him, he gains knowledge about what his body means. John Paul calls this the ‘original innocence of “knowledge”’ (TOB 12:3). The story expresses the movement of human identity from the pole of non-identity with the animals to the other of immediate recognition upon seeing the ‘flesh of my flesh.’

This consideration of man’s participation in the exterior world does not go far enough in accounting for the meaning of original nakedness, though. For this, John Paul probes ‘The Inner Dimension of Vision’ (TOB 12:4). The man and the woman communicate through their ‘common union’ which allows ‘both to reach and to express a reality that is proper and pertinent to the sphere of subjects-persons alone’. What then, was evident from their visible, exterior participation in the world, that ‘the body *manifests* man’ and ‘acts as an intermediary’ that allows sexual communication, ‘*corresponds [to] the “interior” fullness of the vision of man in God*’. This vision of God for man is that he will constitute God’s own ‘image.’ John Paul sees in the text an important distinction concerning original nakedness; that nakedness can be assessed both as an “*exterior” perception*’; that is, physical nakedness, and as an ontological nakedness which is how man is in the *mind* of God. The pope’s text explicates this as man being naked – it is what he ‘is’ – prior to his becoming aware of that nakedness.

Further scriptural support is given (n22) to the ‘nakedness’ of man before God who ‘penetrates the creature.’ The body is thus understood as in some sense porous or permeable. This is to say that human matter in its very structure is open and receptive to Spirit. The human body is made with the capacity to host divinity. Again, Mary’s particular (and literal) *hosting* of the Second Person of the Trinity in gestation, is structurally that which each human body is capable of. The *gestation* of the Word is the goal of each believer who will realise this maternity in the

spiritual, rather than the physical order. There is also a reciprocal understanding not made explicit in John Paul's note. Just as man is naked before God and so is fully displayed, fully comprehensible to the divine, so man is fully comprehensible to himself in being so penetrated. Just as 'God penetrates the creature' so the creature not only is the recipient of that penetration, but analogically participates in it by being made able to penetrate his own opacity. Sharing in the divine capacity associated with divine wisdom to pervade and penetrate all things, man penetrates with his interior vision. This notion of man's capacity to echo God's penetration with insight into the true nature of things reaches its zenith in the gospel understanding of mutual inter-penetration; God dwelling in the believer and the believer in God (cf. John 17:21). As woman and man stand in each other's presence, each beholding the other, they behold in one another the fullness of the creature who is made for '*interpersonal communication*' (TOB 12:5). In such beholding of the essence of the person, man is participating in, and sharing in, the pervasive purity of the divine Spirit who sees all things. Furthermore, as John Paul notes in the next audience, what is seen in the original divine vision of creation in Genesis 1:31, was 'very good.' As they are seeing each other '*through the very mystery of creation, as it were,*' the man and the woman are seeing each other '*more fully and clearly*' than through their eyesight.

### ***3.4.3 Nakedness and corrupted vision***

Shame is a disruption of this 'interior gaze' and is associated with 'a specific limitation of vision through the eyes of the body' which troubles, even threatens, personal intimacy. The distorted vision affects not only the morally culpable human agents, but the whole of the created order, attesting to the integration and ordered unity of creation. Levi-Strauss<sup>160</sup> writes that one of the mediators deployed in some myths is garments, as they mediate between nature and culture. This mediation is deployed in the earlier biblical creation myth where the first body-coverings were fig-leaves stitched together; nature-life now bound to culture-death. Not necessary for warmth or physical protection, they are concrete signs of alienation; self-protective body prophylactics, the purpose of

---

<sup>160</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structure of Myth*, 441

which is to block and with-hold. The serpent's lie believed and acted upon initiates a world of cover-up. What had been morally-neutral vegetal life is now co-opted as a sign of moral guilt and shame.

Until the late twentieth-century, artistic portrayals of the Virgin have dressed her very modestly, shying away from all but essential renderings of flesh, most usually just the face and hands.<sup>161</sup> There is a sense, though, in which nakedness more befits her as she conforms to God's original intention for humanity. Physical nakedness would outwardly express her moral nakedness. Unlike Adam and Eve, she has no need to clothe herself as she has nothing to hide. Having always trusted in God and the benevolence of God's vision, Mary has never sought to self-protectively withhold anything of her person, including her body. This psychic and spiritual nakedness associates Mary with divine Wisdom;<sup>162</sup> whose purity penetrates the hard of heart.<sup>163</sup>

The artistic portrayal of nakedness is a delicate issue owing to the tensions between its original innocent meaning and its subsequent debasement. Three of John Paul's catechetical audiences in 1981 (TOB 60-63) appear under the heading: 'Appendix: The Ethos of the Body in Art and Media.' In this short sub-series, the pope reflects on the difficulties of portraying the naked body in art so that its innate '*meaning of a gift of the person to the person*' (TOB 61:1) is retained. He identifies the central problem as being 'a question about the human body as an object of culture' (TOB 60:3). The 'very delicate problem' (TOB 61:1) is that in artistic portrayals, especially those of photography and film, 'the human body loses that deeply subjective meaning of the gift and becomes an object destined for the knowledge of many' (TOB 61:1). The pope's contention resonates with the experience of Kate Moss. In an extended interview in which she

---

<sup>161</sup> Margaret Miles notes that in the West, images of female nakedness purported to reveal the nature of the woman depicted; a nature that was 'sensual, sinful, or threatening,' hence used in depictions of Eve, Susanna, and grotesques. Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 120.

<sup>162</sup> The Deutero-Canonical Wisdom of Solomon says of Wisdom: 'because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things' (Wis. 7:24), cited in TOB 12:4, n22.

<sup>163</sup> Rowan Williams sees holiness and dependency as inseparable; that the proper response to God is to let go of any pretensions to self-sufficiency. He calls such central and basic letting-go 'my nakedness before God as God.' Rowan Williams, "The Seal of Orthodoxy: Mary and the Heart of Christian Doctrine," in *Say Yes to God: Mary and the Revealing of the Word Made Flesh*, ed. Martin Warner (London: Tufon Books, 1999), 28. This moral virtue of psychic nakedness is seen in reverse perspective in a biblical epistle: 'And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account' (Heb. 4:13).

reflected on her twenty-five-year career in fashion modelling, Moss disclosed her discomfort and distress at being photographed naked for work assignments. At the age of sixteen, told to model naked, she recalls: 'So I'd lock myself in the toilet and cry and then come out and do it. I never felt very comfortable about it.'<sup>164</sup> Of another work engagement, Moss further recalls: 'I had a nervous breakdown when I was 17 or 18 [...] It didn't feel like me at all. I felt really bad about straddling this buff guy. I didn't like it. I couldn't get out of bed for two weeks.'<sup>165</sup>

Nakedness per se in artistic representations is not rebuked in TOB. John Paul explicitly praises some artworks of naked subjects for their capacity to lead the viewer 'through the body to the whole personal mystery of man' (TOB 63:5). The pope had presided over the restoration of the Sistine Chapel (1979-1994) and approved the removal of loincloths which had been painted over some of the original nudes. In his homily at the celebratory Mass in the restored chapel, he had lauded the place as 'the sanctuary of the theology of the human body.'<sup>166</sup> Nakedness that was originally to signify the mutual gift of the whole person, hence Genesis 2:25 'both were naked...but they did not feel shame', radically changes upon the first breaking of the covenant narrated in Genesis 3:7 'Then [...] they realized that they were naked; they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths' (TOB 11). Historical man lives within this latter condition of self-consciousness concerning nakedness. This in turn presents a problem that occurs on both sides of a work of art that depicts nudity; the creative side involving the intention of the artist, and the receptive side, involving the way the work is looked at. Between this binary of artist and viewer sits the 'model,' a designator which has already signalled an eclipse of the sitter's agency and subjectivity. The ambivalence of nakedness and attendant tensions concerning modesty and propriety were reflected in the controversy that attended the installation of a small (eighteen-inch) commissioned limewood sculpture, *Madonna and Child*, in St Matthew's Westminster, in 2000. English sculptor, Guy Reid,

---

<sup>164</sup> James Fox, "The Riddle of Kate Moss," *Vanity Fair*, December 2012, 146.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>166</sup> John Paul II, "Celebration of the Unveiling of the Restorations of Michelangelo's Frescoes in the Sistine Chapel," (1994), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19940408\\_restauri-sistina.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19940408_restauri-sistina.html). Homily.

then a devout Anglican, explained the complete nakedness of the two figures as a visual reference to their being the new Adam and Eve.<sup>167</sup>

Mary as the new Eve is she who in whom the 'interior gaze' participates in full interpersonal communication and has suffered no corruption. Spiritual and sensible are in her seamlessly conjoined, her body free from the experience of 'an inner break and antithesis' (TOB 13:1).

### **3.5 The spousal meaning of the body**

#### ***3.5.1 Creation and persons as gifts***

The foundational premise of the Genesis creation accounts is that man understands himself rightly only in so far as he sees himself as a creature created out of love. This proceeds from the logic that God assessed creation as 'very good'; goodness only proceeds from the good; the One who is good is Love, that is, God (TOB 13:3). The body given to its spouse in love manifests the 'mystery of creation' (TOB 13:4): that the world was made as gift 'for' man (male and female) who, as the image of God, is the only creature able to understand the meaning of the gift. This gift relation is mutually reciprocal: world being given to man who the world also receives as gift; man receiving the world and giving himself to it.

By virtue of the dual modalities of human embodiment, the gift relation can be experienced in inter-personal relations; most fully in a spousal relationship where each is able to '*exist in a relation of reciprocal gift*' (TOB 14:1). As the undifferentiated man's solitude was deemed 'not good,' the implication is that relationality - living with, or for, someone else - is a necessary good and is one marker of the content of the *imago Dei*. In a relationship of a unique type, spouses have the privilege and the possibility of sharing in the creative act of God through spousal sexual union while at the same time freeing each other from '*the "constraint" of his own body and his own sex*' (TOB 14:6). The nakedness of the spouses is linked to this freedom from

---

<sup>167</sup> Sarah Jane Boss, "The Naked Madonna," *The Tablet*, 17 February 2001. The nakedness of the Christ figure draws upon artistic representations from the Middle Ages and Renaissance which used it to signify His real humanity.

constraint. Citing the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et spes* 24:3,<sup>168</sup> that man is the only creature willed by God ‘for its own sake,’ John Paul says of the spousal relationship that it is intended to manifest most fully that same ‘freedom of the gift’ (TOB 15:2); each spouse relating in love to the other ‘for their own sake.’

The hermeneutic of gift runs so deep that the world is ‘irradiated’ with Love, the Holy Spirit (TOB 16:1). Man receives himself as that which he is – the image of God – and his task is then to communicate this image to the world, and in so doing, multiplying the divine image. In man’s original state, spousal sexual union takes place in a state of innocence. This innocence is so radical that ‘*at its very roots, [it] excludes the shame of the body* in the relation between man and woman’ (TOB 16:4). This innocence, in which the human heart is undefiled, could better be understood as ‘original righteousness’ (TOB 16:4).

### 3.5.2 *Sexual essentialism*

While the qualities of mutuality, freely-given giftedness, and loving acceptance of the other carry their own appeal, other claims of John Paul’s in relation to the spousal meaning of the body are more contentious. The pope ascribes essential characteristics to each of the sexes. In particular, he asserts that in Genesis 4:1, ‘the one who knows is the man and the one who is known is the woman, the wife’ (TOB 21:2), and later in the same section: ‘*the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood.*’ The former seems to ascribe active cognition and agency to the man; passively receptive objectivity to the woman. John Paul appears here to absorb and promote as divinely intended, a hierarchical relation within the male-female distinction. The italicised quotation above links femininity and motherhood which seems to resituate woman within the familial and domestic, where she is defined and circumscribed by the maternal realisation of her female body. Both the quoted assertions from TOB 21:2 are

---

<sup>168</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3 has been referenced or cited by John Paul II more than one hundred times in his papal writings. He had been heavily involved in the redaction of GS, during which time the emphasis shifted towards theological anthropology. Cf. William Newton, "John Paul II and *Gaudium et Spes* 22: his use of the text and his involvement in its authorship," [https://www.academia.edu/3818133/John\\_Paul\\_II\\_and\\_Gaudium\\_et\\_Spes\\_22\\_his\\_use\\_of\\_the\\_text\\_and\\_his\\_involvement\\_in\\_its\\_authorship?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/3818133/John_Paul_II_and_Gaudium_et_Spes_22_his_use_of_the_text_and_his_involvement_in_its_authorship?auto=download).

universalist declamations which seem to preclude alternative manners of revealing and manifesting femininity and to assume that femininity is something that can be unambiguously determined. While sex-based differences between man and woman extend throughout their entire persons, and are not limited to chromosomal differentiation, (recent genetic research has determined that in excess of 6,500 gene expressions – approximately one third of the human genome - differ between man and woman),<sup>169</sup> identifying the content of such difference in terms of *masculinity* or *femininity* is problematic if one wishes to avoid sexual stereotyping. It is difficult to reconcile equality of sexual difference with relational equality where one sex is deemed to be, of its nature, the active agent and one the passive. Ironically, criticism of, or reticence in endorsing, John Paul's apparent sexual stereotyping, tends to proceed from a premise of a hierarchical binary of value, where *active-passive* is valued as *desirable-undesirable*, thereby participating in a sublimated endorsement of masculine values over feminine.

John Paul contextualizes his statements of sexual essentialism, such as those above, within an analysis of 'knowledge' as a biblical term and concept. He contends that knowing in the Bible signifies 'concrete experience,' not only intellectual knowledge (TOB 20:2, n31). It is a term especially used of conjugal relations, but also of all sexual relations, including the illicit and the intentionally abstemious. To say of the first conjugal unity that Adam in that act 'knew' his wife, is to equate the experience of their being 'one flesh' with knowledge. The pope is careful to extend this knowledge, gleaned experientially, to the woman as well as the man. Although Genesis 4:1-2 speaks of the man's knowledge, John Paul argues that the nature of the act, their equality before God, and the mutuality of the hermeneutic of 'gift' means that knowledge was also bestowed on each. It is not only that the woman 'is given' to the man, but he is likewise given to her (TOB 20:3-

---

<sup>169</sup> As reported by the Weizmann Institute, Rehovot, Israel, 3rd May 2017, concerning the findings of M. Gershoni and S. Pietrokovski, "The Landscape of Sex-Differential Transcriptome and Its Consequent Selection in Human Adults," *BMC Biology* 15, no. 7 (2017). <https://wiswander.weizmann.ac.il/life-sciences/researchers-identify-6500-genes-are-expressed-differently-men-and-women>

4), a reading of mutuality which mitigates the reservations indicated above concerning the essentialism of John Paul's understanding of sexual difference.

Conjugal union as a form of knowledge is developed in scripture so that it stands as an archetype of the union between God and his people.<sup>170</sup> It becomes integral to a literary tradition that culminates in Paul's application of it to Christ and the church in Ephesians 5. The archetype is not limited to the physical relation but includes the relation of knowing. It stimulates the creative imagination which generates further images based on the archetype. Furthermore, conjugal union is a type of knowledge gleaned in and through the body. Unlike Platonic *eros* which yearned for a release from materiality towards the transcendent Beautiful, biblical knowledge shows no hostility to the physical (TOB 22:4, n35). Rather, marriage is used in the book of Isaiah (Is. 62:5) as the supreme image of God's engagement with His people, where the metaphor of construction ('builder') gives way to the conjugal so as to express 'rejoicing.' The matrimonial metaphor segues into the metaphor of wine, possibly via associations of a wedding banquet, so linking and binding the construction metaphor (builder-creator) to an image of communal feasting, transformation, and the full and unrestricted outpouring of self for other in love. As Sallie McFague notes, 'parental images [for God] [...] cannot express mutuality, maturity, co-operation, responsibility, or reciprocity,' so implying the desirability for supplementary personal metaphors, such as lover, or spouse.<sup>171</sup>

Secondly, the pope grounds his assertion within the logic of the particular *gift* of the man to the woman and vice versa. Both human-as-male and human-as-female were equally willed and created for their own sakes. Each comes to an enriched understanding of who and what each is through the experience of self-donation as 'one flesh.' It is in this gifting of each to each that there is 'mutual self-realization' (TOB 21:3). John Paul sees a theological scriptural link between the prayer offered by the Johannine Christ that 'all may be one...as we are one' (Jn 17:21-22; see note, TOB 15:1) and an authentic union of creatures-as-gift. The comparison ('as') has as its goal the

---

<sup>170</sup> *Archetype* here is used as C.G. Jung identified it, as an *a priori* form that is filled with the content of experience. The archetypal form here is the mutual relation between the man and the woman, 'a relation based on the binary and complementary realization of the human being in two sexes,' TOB 21:1, n32.

<sup>171</sup> Cited in Tatman, 217.



type of unity constituted within the Godhead where the intra-Trinitarian union of love retains differentiation and integrity of persons, along with loving faithfulness and fecundity. While Christ's prayer was specifically referring to the union of believers, *unity* was one of the essential characteristics presented in Genesis so this original 'exemplary' union is included within Christ's prayer (TOB 15:1, n25).

In his 1995 pastoral letter to women, the pope spoke of the need for women to be included in employment and service outside the home in order that feminine perspectives, such as acknowledgement of the person,<sup>172</sup> be incorporated into the wider society, as a check and balance against social and economic structures 'organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity'<sup>173</sup>; (a recommendation for the inclusion, one may say, of the poetic, not just the coldly rational and utilitarian). The themes of this letter continue those of *Mulieris dignitatem* and harmonise with the themes developed more extensively in his *Theology of the Body*, where he speaks of motherhood as manifesting and revealing '*the mystery of femininity*' (TOB 21:2). The woman as the one who uniquely conceives and gives birth, is especially predisposed by the experience of gestation to acceptance of, and service to, the other.<sup>174</sup> She 'stands before the man as mother' (TOB 21:2). The *knowledge* each had of the other in their act of spousal union is deepened and expanded in a new way in motherhood as both now '*know each other reciprocally in the "third", originated by both*' (TOB 21:4). On John Paul's account, gender (*masculinity* and *femininity*) is not detached from sex, *male* and *female*,<sup>175</sup> so is not regarded as constructed but as given. What is given is not only physical difference but ontological difference: 'It is only through the duality of the "masculine" and the "feminine" that the "human" finds full realization.'<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> "Letter to Women" 12.

<sup>173</sup> "Letter to Women" 4.

<sup>174</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §18.

<sup>175</sup> 'Despite their abstract form, these words are used in TOB to signify man and woman in their concrete and visible sexual characteristics.' Waldstein, index: masculinity; femininity.

<sup>176</sup> "Letter to Women" 7.

The importance attached to, and attention given by, the pope to conjugal sexual union as the paradigmatic sign of gift of self to other in love is not a relegation or exclusion of those who do not marry. The call to self-donating love in communion with others is a call to every person and realisable in other familial relationships, as well as within friendship, or indeed, within any human contact. John Paul integrates the gospel words of Jesus (Mat. 19:11-12) when, in answer to interrogation by the Pharisees about marriage, he spoke of those who refrain from marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (TOB 73:2). This voluntary alternative to marriage realises differently the self as a gift to others (TOB 77:2).

### *3.5.2 The Virgin Mary and sexual essentialism*

The Virgin Mary is the creature where this two-fold aspect of spousal donation meets. She is, in her perpetual virginity, one who refrains from marriage for the sake of the kingdom and is simultaneously the one who most fully answers the call of God in the concrete circumstances of her own life, so being the one who gives herself completely in spousal love. The decisive moment of her spousal giving of herself to God is at the Annunciation. Invited and called by God, Mary is aroused by the Spirit to respond to the Father which is realised in the conception of the Son. Inevitably one of the drawbacks of the Trinitarian language used here is what appears to be the gendering of God. Imaginatively, guided by the classical language, God is formulated as male to Mary's female. In consenting to her own participation in God's plan, Mary is fulfilling her own set of relations with each person of the Trinity which can be formulated as: daughter of the One who sent, spouse of the One who is poured out, and mother of the One who is sent. It is the maternal relation, which relies upon Mary's being female, which activates a corresponding *masculine* conception of God in this case, as human generation requires maleness which Mary could not supply.

Perhaps, paradoxically, this could also be one of the strengths of the Annunciation typology; that it functions as an instantiation of the love-in-difference that is realised as love-in-unity. The typology functions at the analogical level. The union of Mary and the Divine is both the summit of restored relationship between human creature and God, and the original prototype of that relation which provided the founding analogue of spousal sexual union 'in the beginning.' Noel

Rowe in his poem, '*Magnificat*: 1. Annunciation' (4.4.2 below), draws upon this strong metaphoric connection, explicitly expressing Mary's fullness of *agape* as a concurrent fullness of *eros*. The direction of the typology's movement begins with the original intention of the Creator who wanted a relationship of reciprocal love with humans. Desiring this love-filled, intimate and perpetual union with his human creatures, they were made as the Creator's very image, male and female. As such, they were made with a dual capacity to experience union with God even in this bodily, earthly life, as the witness of the saints attests, and to experience a close analogue of it in human love. The interaction of the male and the female here can be illuminated by considering the human brain which, in its two asymmetric hemispheres, functions as a unity even though each hemisphere tends towards a different way of interpreting and interacting with the world; the left inclining more towards reason, the right towards imagination. The functions of each hemisphere are different but not rigidly enforced. There is overlap in the functions; both hemispheres being necessary for reasoning and for imagining.<sup>177</sup> Following John Paul's reading, for coitus to image God it must proceed from a spousal relationship between a male and a female; that is, a relationship of freely-given, mutual love which is enduring and open to the possibility of its generating life.

### ***3.5.3 Criticism of John Paul's sexual essentialism***

In her book, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, Sarah Coakley sets out to defend the usefulness of systematic theology as a contemporary academic discipline. Her method involves firstly, expanding its domain beyond the bounds of exclusively analytic *male* thinking; secondly, to re-shape its *modus operandi* as an inter-connected, fluid and evolutionary practice, able to incorporate some contemporary attitudes towards sex and gender.<sup>178</sup> In doing this, Coakley is wanting to negotiate a path through three theological positions, (reactive orthodoxy, 'escapism' to the patristic or high medieval past, liberal feminist theology), with none of which she fully identifies. She explicitly

---

<sup>177</sup> Iain McGilchrist, "The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World," RSA Lecture, (November 17, 2010), <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/videos/2011/10/rsa-animate--the-divided-brain/rsa-lecture-ian-mcgilchrist-transcript.pdf>. McGilchrist's hypothesis has purportedly been outrun by subsequent neuroscience.

<sup>178</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'on the Trinity'* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xv.

associates ‘reactive orthodoxy’ with John Paul II and Benedict XVI, criticising them for practising ‘a high, authoritarian ecclesiastical Christian “orthodoxy”, cut off from the real “sea” of lived religion by hierarchical avoidance or denial.’<sup>179</sup> Coakley’s statement expresses three attitudes towards orthodoxy. Firstly, it implies that orthodoxy is an ideal largely unattainable in the lived reality of life. Secondly, it implies that creedal formulations are not transformative expressions. Thirdly, to suggest orthodoxy is a ‘process’ is to imply it changes, presumably to changed social patterns. This would make society the standard to which the church is held.

Coakley’s objections to John Paul II and Benedict XVI indirectly criticize the governance structure of the institutional Roman Catholic Church; the *top-down* approach. They also indirectly criticize the maintenance of church discipline via adherence to doctrinal norms. It is the case that both popes were concerned with ecclesial order and expected consistent adherence, publicly and privately, to church dogma.<sup>180</sup> John Paul’s major contribution to dogmatic clarity for the laity, an exercise in apodictic definition, is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which he promulgated in 1992 (see Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei depositum*). Coakley characterizes the attitude of those popes towards the deposit of faith as defensive and protective. The Magisterium has historically understood its function as preservative, not innovative, so the popes she names are not exceptional in their conformity. Coakley distinguishes creedal assent from orthodoxy; the latter she sees as ‘ongoing, spiritual *project*.’<sup>181</sup>

A wish to keep the faith aired and refreshed so that it can speak to the concerns, and accommodate the knowledge expansion, of successive generations, so deepening its own understanding, is laudable. The difficulty with Coakley’s position is that in recasting ‘orthodoxy’ as a process, through which one responds to, and appropriates anew, the formulations of the creeds, she advocates a privileging of interpretation over, and possibly against, the written record of scripture,

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>180</sup> See, for example, John Paul II, “Apostolic Journey to Ireland. Homily at Holy Mass in Phoenix Park,” (1979), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790929\\_irlanda-dublino.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790929_irlanda-dublino.html). par. 5.

<sup>181</sup> Coakley, 5.

doctrine and creeds. While there are biblical indicators that assent to the inherited beliefs of the church is necessary but not sufficient to establish faith (cf. Jas. 1:22-25), Coakley does not make clear whose is the responsibility for determining orthodoxy, if not a centralized magisterium (lay believers? theologians?). This looseness introduces the probability of orthodoxy being splintered into multiple different interpretations or ‘processes.’ How would disputes between different processes be arbitrated? Despite her intention to keep God central, and to not abandon ‘orthodoxy,’ it is hard to see in what meaningful and concrete sense orthodoxy would continue to exist, and how it would be recognizably constant over time. How would any one of the processes be adjudicated, and by whom? Coakley proposes no mechanism for regulating doctrine. In the absence of ecclesial regulatory apparatus, claims of ecclesial universality would collapse. If doctrinal orthodoxy is a process of never arriving, then what is the status of the content of revelation and on what basis does evangelism proceed?

Coakley seeks to answer contemporary theological problems while drawing on the patrimony of the faith (by looking at Gregory of Nyssa, for example) and also integrating knowledge from secular disciplines (such as the social sciences) while seeking to ground all in the practice of contemplative prayer as a theological discipline. She calls her syncretic approach ‘*théologie totale*.’ One of Coakley’s chief moves is to promote ‘desire’ as the defining human characteristic, justifying this promotion by claiming desire is ‘*more fundamental than “sex”*’<sup>182</sup> and ‘*also more fundamental than gender*.’<sup>183</sup> This longing Coakley identifies as an eschatological longing for God, and *eros* as that which indicates God through the experience of longing for another. Erotic longing is also that which can, and finally will, only be fulfilled in God. Desire becomes that on account of which the human is sexed.

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 10. Coakley means by *sex*, physical sexual relations.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 52. Coakley’s use of this term is less straight-forward than her use of *sex*. She avoids using the terms *masculine* and *feminine* wanting, it seems, to avoid presenting gender as that which is inscribed upon biological sex. Cf. Celia Kitzinger, “Intersexuality: Deconstructing the Sex/Gender Binary,” *Feminism & Psychology* 9, no. 4 (1999): 493.

This position is consistent with John Paul's reading of Genesis, where it is the human who images God, prior to considerations of sexual dimorphism, and is a contemporary echo of Augustine's famously poetic: 'our hearts are restless till they rest in thee.' This position has generous latitude so as to include all whose bodies do not conform to biological sexual norms. All such persons share in the equal and inviolable dignity of the human. Where it can seem oddly de-personalising is when 'desire,' promoted as a primary category, is divorced from actual, specifically-sexed, desiring bodies.

*Desire, sex, and gender*

Coakley's intention is not that sex and gender do not matter, rather that they matter differently from the way some contemporary gender theory invokes them, for example by claiming that sex can be determined by personal *fiat*. She does, though, share gender theory's commitment to a de-naturalised body; that there is no *natural* sexed body to be accessed, free of cultural inscriptions. This position *de facto* elides *sex* and *gender* as both being social constructs. Coakley defines *gender* in a very generalized and minimalistic way as 'embodied difference.'<sup>184</sup> This is held to be 'ineradicable'<sup>185</sup> even *post mortem*. *Gender* as a category within the world, is, as with all else in the world, fallen, yet redeemable. Coakley concurs with John Paul's reading that sex differentiation is a crucial part of the *imago Dei* (Gen.1:26-27); she departs from him in her preparedness to include within gender, not only 'difference,' but Judith Butler's idea of 'performativity.'<sup>186</sup> Coakley, like Butler, wants to eschew both restrictive gendering and restrictive sexual categorizing.

Whereas John Paul's anthropology tended to strongly align sex and gender, Coakley intentionally avoids linking gender with biological sex. *Gender* she sees as something ritualized according to cultural evaluations ('performed') but not rooted in any property of the physical body. Coakley thereby avoids the 'sexual binary' by detaching the difference of gender from sex difference. Gender is construed loosely and broadly as an unspecified type of 'embodied difference' which avoids

---

<sup>184</sup> Coakley, 55.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 53.

certain conceptualizations Coakley finds problematic (binary division; subordinationism; a presumed stability of gendering; gendered stereotyping) while introducing others that are no less seriously problematic (no intrinsic relationality signed in the differently-sexed bodies; nothing in reality on which to ground gender difference; no linkage of sex difference with procreation).

If the *telos* of *eros* is God, then God becomes the standard against which all desires are measured. Coakley's broad primary aim is to reintegrate *eros* within theology in such a way as to bypass the current impasse within theological and secular circles between those for whom sex distinction is an essential trait of the person (such as John Paul II) and those for whom it is not. Coakley seeks to answer her aim by demoting sexual difference and promoting *desire* as a fundamental category. Inverting Freud, Coakley suggests that sex is about God; the ecstatic yearning for the other which intimates and echoes 'the perpetual *ekstasis* and return' within the Trinity.<sup>187</sup> The problem with Coakley's suggestion is that by abstracting *desire* from its expression as male-female *eros*, the characteristics that made it a uniquely suitable metaphor for union with God are sacrificed. *Desire* may indeed be a human fundamental but matrimony contributes a distinctive way to grasp something of the nature of what eschatological unity of persons and God will involve.

One of Coakley's secondary aims is to reimagine trinitarian relations so as to exclude the "linear" subordinationism of the Nicene Creed. The Spirit, sometimes historically analogized as 'feminine,' and not co-incidentally, a subordinated 'third,'<sup>188</sup> is seen by Coakley as the primary divine power in terms of its dealings with people.<sup>189</sup> Coakley's aim in so doing is not to substitute a feminine for a masculine hierarchy, but to avoid a gendered 'complementarity' within the Trinity that subordinates the feminized Spirit to the Father and the Son. The Spirit, she speculates, invites, and then leads, the "procession" of others into the Father. In purging conceptions of trinitarian linearity, Coakley is also recasting 'alterity' by shifting the place where contemplation of the Trinity starts,

---

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 331. A fruitful support for Coakley's resistance to complementary gendering within the Trinity is the gendering of the Hebrew word, *ruah*, often translated as *spirit* which, although most often used as a feminine noun, could also be used as a masculine. Cf. Gideon Ofrat, *The Jewish Derrida*, trans. Peretz Kidron, Library of Jewish Philosophy (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>189</sup> Coakley, 330.

away from the *source* (Father), to the one who leads others to that source (Spirit). Her manoeuvre partially succeeds in realising her strategy. Conceptually repositioning the Holy Spirit so it is no longer the (neglected) other offers a fresh perspective on the Trinity. Two anomalies pertain, though: hierarchy is not done away with; the leadership is just rotated, and secondly, as guide of its invitees, the Spirit operates in a Marian guise, as ‘handmaid,’ which seems at odds with Coakley’s feminist concerns.

Coakley is also bypassing any construal of human sexual complementarity (or its symbolic transference to the Trinity) as articulated in John Paul’s anthropology. Complementarity construed along John Paul’s lines of ‘different but complementary’ has been criticized for obscuring female subordination to male, and for not affording equal value to those qualities deemed *feminine*;<sup>190</sup> criticisms that John Paul forestalls, as he sees the primacy of ‘gift,’ ‘mutuality’ and ‘reciprocity’ ensuring the equal dignity of both (see 3.5.2 above). John Paul’s account also resists sociocultural essentialism of the type which equates men with separateness and women with relatedness. Notably, he reads ‘relatedness’ as an essential quality of the human: the person always *refers*, to his/her proximate origin, (parents), and ultimate origin, (God), and is always in relationship. It was the primeval man’s aloneness which God had declared ‘not good,’ signalling relationality as essential for men as well as women. Another of the merits of John Paul’s reading is his construal of complementarity where *difference* is not construed in terms of conflict. John Paul does, though, express a gendered social essentialism in his talk of “‘*the genius of women*’” in his 1995 letter to women, (9-12). This ‘genius’ is serving and caring for others; nurturing relational gifts exercised in the wider society, church, and home.

One of the criticisms levelled against biological sexual essentialism is that it assumes qualitative, identifiable differences which are universal, thus prioritizing the general over the particular. However, as Daniel Horan warns, over-emphasis on the particular ‘runs the risk of dissociating the human person from humanity as such,’ and of ignoring ample evidence from the

---

<sup>190</sup> Daniel P. Horan, "Beyond Essentialism and Complementarity: Toward a Theological Anthropology Rooted in *Haecceitas*," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 100-02.



natural sciences that there is indeed a ‘general’ to which each particular belongs.<sup>191</sup> Sexed bodies can be qualitatively described according to the presence of different properties: primary or secondary sex characteristics, gonads, chromosomes, or hormones, which usually fully align, forming the person as female or male, but which do not align in exceptional cases of the inter-sexed.<sup>192</sup> These exceptions point to the usual expected properties belonging to male and female as being natural but not inevitable. This absence of inevitability softens the boundaries of *male* and *female* and prohibits strictly absolute sex categorization. Persons with indeterminate biological sex presentation complicate the ways in which sex interacts with gendered presentation and a psychological sense of the sexed self.

### 3.6 The language of the body

A key concept of John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* is that of ‘the language of the body’ to which he devotes fourteen of his 129 catecheses. Michael Waldstein’s index entry for ‘Language of the Body’ draws attention to the Polish of the pope’s original text, noting that it refers to ‘words that are actually spoken rather than language in general.’ That is, John Paul’s usage of ‘language’ means an action of the speaking subject.

#### 3.6.1 Philosophic underpinning of ‘language of the body’

The philosophic underpinning for his papal reflections upon language as action had been published years earlier when writing in academic capacity as Karol Wojtyła. His philosophic contribution to phenomenology, *The Acting Person*,<sup>193</sup> sought to understand the person for his own sake through systematic analysis of the relation between person and action. Motivated to

---

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 102. The complete human genome was sequenced by 2001. Note *human*, not *male* and *female*.

<sup>192</sup> Daphna Joel, "Genetic-Gonadal-Genitals Sex (3g-Sex) and the Misconception of Brain and Gender, or, Why 3g-Males and 3g-Females Have Intersex Brain and Intersex Gender," *Biology of Sex Differences* 3, no. 1 (2012). Similarly, John Paul II cautions against a preference for the concrete and particular that rejects the notion of the universal, and in so doing, rejects the universality of the faith content of the church. John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*, §69,

<sup>193</sup> Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki. Revised ed. in collaboration with Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. 10 (Dordrecht; Boston; London: D. Reidel Publishing, 1979).

analyse the cognitive process whereby man experiences himself both as subject ('I') and object ('the me that I have to face'), he considers how man understands himself through cognitively apprehending that he acts; that he is an 'acting person.' In his actions, man always experiences himself because: 'Man's experience of anything outside of himself is always associated with the experience of himself, and he never experiences anything external without having at the same time the experience of himself.'<sup>194</sup> The relation between person and action is experienced and it is then able to be a subject of reflection.<sup>195</sup> Man, that is to say, is both the originator of his own action, (where 'action' is both act and process),<sup>196</sup> and, cognizant of himself as actor, an object for his own interpretation. Correct interpretation can lead to understanding; an event in which the person transcends himself. John Paul's term, 'language of the body,' is a metaphor where 'words spoken' encompasses actions, gestures and deeds.

Christian understanding is that consistency in personal intention and praxis, and their coherence with scriptural divine commands, orients the person towards God. Such a person's actions constitute a type of worship. Christian liturgical devotion and practice, more especially within the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, acknowledge that scriptural and liturgical words bear especial significance in shaping the person while also teaching that those words are ordered towards forming disciples who are active in the world. Worshipful bodies both receive the word and become agents of it in knowledge and action.<sup>197</sup> Wojtyła argues in *The Acting Person* that it is action that reveals the person, rather than action presupposing the person.<sup>198</sup> Wojtyła intends by *action* those actions which are conscious and voluntary, 'hence he has the awareness of the action as well as of the person in their dynamic interrelation.'<sup>199</sup> As action and person are cohesively unified, the performance of a morally positive action results in the fulfilment of the

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>197</sup> Martha Finch, "Rehabilitating Materiality: Bodies, Gods and Religion," *Religion* 42, no. 4 (2012): 626.

<sup>198</sup> Wojtyła and Tymieniecka, 11.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 31.

person. Wojtyła deduces from this effect, two dimensions of any action: the external, as an action is outwardly directed to some object in the world, and the internal, as actions determine the actor's selfhood.<sup>200</sup> Owing to the inner dimension of action, it is not fleeting, as its performance in time would suggest, but perdures, leaving its 'trace' within the person, rather than vanishing.<sup>201</sup> Wojtyła expands upon the connection between experiential knowledge of that object to which an action is directed, and the self who performs the action, drawing out its implications for devotional practice. So, for example, acting upon an inner devotion by outwardly practising that devotion results in the fulfilment of the devotee owing to the objective moral value of the action cohering in the person.<sup>202</sup>

### ***3.6.2 Language and symbolic thought***

The concept, *language*, as used in the *Theology of the Body* can be further clarified by looking at language's relationship with symbol. In his enquiry into the origins of symbolic thought, social anthropologist, Alan Barnard, constructs a hypothesis that human language developed in order to accommodate symbolic thought.<sup>203</sup> Only humans have developed language which Barnard distinguishes from animal communication, and only humans communicate symbolically.<sup>204</sup> The syntactic complexity of languages Barnard hypothesises is directly correlated to the complexity of symbolic thought.<sup>205</sup> Linguistic complexity, he suggests, developed in order to meet the demands of narrative, one of the chief characteristics of which is recursion; the embedding of sentences within sentences which requires changes in word forms to make meaning clear. Recursion can be extremely complex and multi-layered. Barnard uses an illustrative ethnological example of a myth which contained five sentences within one, a quotation within a

---

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Alan Barnard, *Genesis of Symbolic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 4-5. Barnard asserts that symbolic thought is inherently social in its nature. It can only develop after several stages of intentionality have developed in a person, from the primary stage of believing something, to the second-stage of 'believing that someone else believes something.' It is suggested that religion needs fifth-level intentionality.

quotation, mythological characters who are not human but who behave as if they were, and the narrative as a whole built upon a metaphor.<sup>206</sup> Barnard therefore argues that the complexity of language far exceeds what would be necessary for communication. The reason for this, he suggests, is that symbolism lies at the heart of society and symbolism requires sophisticated, ‘full’ language. Included within this language are what Barnard calls its ‘non-communicative aspects’ by which he means ‘art forms [that exist] in their own right, such as mythology and other examples of narrative, and also poetry and song.’<sup>207</sup> Barnard’s concept of communication as used here is narrowly defined as that which denotes.

Barnard’s reasoning about the complex nature of language can be deepened by looking at Denys Turner’s explication of Thomas Aquinas’ anthropology. Barnard claims that human language is predicated on the symbolic, which can only develop once a multi-layered cognitive grasp of human consciousness has developed. Human social life relies upon the symbolic in order to articulate its complex narratives. On Barnard’s hypothesis, symbolism is foundational to being human, and so language develops as it does to accommodate this, but ‘meaning’ is something that is carried by the language, not something that inheres in the body which generates it. For Aquinas, rational human action forms the ‘narrative’ or ‘plot’ of a human life, which life can itself be told as a story.<sup>208</sup> The human being is, by Aquinas’ account, a unity of body and soul. Because the soul cannot be thought of as separable from the body, nor vice versa, the matter which the body is, is fully infused with ‘soul’ which for Aquinas, borrowing an Aristotelian term, is the ‘form,’ or ‘that which accounts for a thing’s being alive in a certain kind of way.’<sup>209</sup> Aquinas’ ‘methodological principle’ is that matter has meaning.<sup>210</sup> Contra Descartes, for whom the self is the centre of the subject’s understanding of the world and of God,<sup>211</sup> for Aquinas,

---

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 84-5.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>208</sup> Turner, 63-4.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 56.

God and the self are known ‘from the standpoint of the world.’<sup>212</sup> Fully embedded in the world which sustains their bodily existence via the provision of other plant and animal life, humans’ interactions in the world inform their understanding of their own nature and their place within the world.

### 3.6.3 *The body as sacrament*

John Paul’s phrase, ‘language of the body,’ refers to actual utterances because ‘language’ is not to be construed as an abstraction detachable from the person who generates it. Communication, whether as word, or deed, exists in the expression which should be an authentic exteriorisation of interior dispositions and thoughts. Such communication extends to every action of the person including, *inter alia*, eyes that encounter another’s, tears, and taking breath.<sup>213</sup> It is owing to their particular embodiment, psychical and physical, that humans have the need and capacity for language. Denys Turner neatly summarises the Thomist anthropology informing John Paul’s thinking: ‘For our bodies are how we are present to one another. Our bodies are how we speak to one another. We might say, the human body is the human person’s extension into language.’<sup>214</sup>

John Paul’s usage of the term, ‘language of the body,’ is not always obviously consistent throughout his *Theology of the Body*. While he does tend to mean that the language of the body is an act of the acting person, he also suggests that the body itself participates in the world of signs and signals. That is to say that the body not only participates in socially-constructed verbal and gestural language systems, but that the body itself is a sign-system or language. This innate somatic expressiveness is owing to the *a priori* inscription by God of each person’s meaning: being willed for her own sake to live in communion with God and others. This forms the ground of the ‘deep *order of the gift and of reciprocal self-giving*’ (TOB 61:3) by which the body is constituted. The body itself is

---

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> In his poem, "Deaf Language," Les Murray speaks of the triple modality of language: the spoken-audible, (negatively intimated in *deaf*); the written-visible, (present in his poem’s published text), and the gestural-felt (where *felt* can refer to interpreting the meaning of another’s gesture). The gestural language of the deaf women in his poem is likened to an occidental language, differently conceived of, which indicates the richness and diversity of the body’s capacity for language. Expressive constraints can induce alternative, imaginative inventiveness. Les A. Murray, *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996), 80.

<sup>214</sup> Turner, 248.

a dense sign along the lines of a symbol, icon or sacrament. The body visibly signifies and makes present the dignity of the person and points beyond itself. It is both reasonable and true to say that 'the body speaks us' in the sense that the body tells persons what they are. The body itself is an epiphany of the person.

### ***3.6.4 Knowledge as action and gift of the body***

John Paul devoted several audiences to analysing how the term *knowledge* is used in the Genesis accounts (TOB 20-23). Acknowledging the historic linguistic background, John Paul establishes in a footnote (TOB 20, n31) that the Hebrew word translated in the English as *knowledge* means something experienced in one's concrete existence, not just something assented to interiorly. Knowledge is therefore understood to be something experienced in the body, not only something that exists disconnectedly in the mind. This is a hermeneutic which does not dismiss the body, nor experience gleaned from living one's life. It is a contrary hermeneutic to the Cartesian where awareness of one's abstract thoughts ('*cogito ergo sum*') is the standard by which a person has confirmed for himself his own ontology. Thinking, though, constitutes only one type of human action, and such a standard minimizes or ignores whole realms of human intellect, such as the sensual, the intuitive, and the imaginative. It is apt to view with suspicion anything outside that which the mind makes.

Such an abstracted and restricted understanding of how the person is present to himself is contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine and practice which centres around sacramental participatory rites. As Karl Rahner writes, in his explication of devotion to the Sacred Heart, there is an interconnectedness between thought and action.<sup>215</sup> It is only in the worshipful action of devotional practice, he says, that one grasps truth: 'here action is the only right way of knowing'; an insight applicable not only to devotional practices but to the whole realm of inter-personal relations. Rahner is making a case for the performative, participatory nature of knowing.<sup>216</sup> This is

---

<sup>215</sup> Karl Rahner, *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. David John Bourke, vol. 8, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 217-29.

<sup>216</sup> Ignatian concentration on the value of spiritual practice influenced von Balthasar. See Ben Quash, "Hans Urs Von Balthasar's 'Theatre of the World': The Aesthetic of a Dramatics," in *Theological*

the type of knowing that the Genesis creation texts present; every dimension of life providing fertile ground for gleaning self-knowledge and knowledge beyond the self. It is the hermeneutical position shared by John Paul II, most notably in his proposition that conjugal sex, when all the proper circumstances are met, images God.

The term ‘knew’ applied to conjugal sexual union occurs for the first time in Genesis 4:1–2 and ‘*raises the conjugal relation of man and woman, that is, the fact that through the duality of sex they become “one flesh”, and brings it into the specific dimension of the persons*’ (TOB 20:3). John Paul means that human sexual relations are not merely animalistic and instinctual. Sexual relations never restrict themselves to *sarx*. They reveal and involve the whole person who is the acting subject. Every action, including every sexual action, is invested with a moral value that the acting subject experiences in the experience of the action. There is a whole depth of meaning to becoming ‘one flesh’ (TOB 20:4). John Paul explicates this more fully in the same section: ‘Together, they thus become one single subject, as it were, of that act and that experience, although they remain two really distinct subjects in this unity.’ Although the Genesis text speaks only of the man knowing the woman, such knowledge is reciprocal as each subject participates equally and reciprocally in the act. Even in this most profound unity, though, neither one can know from the ‘inside’ what the other is experiencing.

## Chapter 4 Bodies of words: poems Marian and maternal

This chapter turns to a different way of knowing, through the reading of poems. This thesis supports the position that, owing to the world's having been created by God, it is more than it appears to be. Creation has an excess of significance; the matter of the world not fully comprehended only in terms of scientific materiality. Persons and world exist in a relation of reciprocal mutuality: man as the world's beneficiary and recipient inclined towards knowing it; world ordered towards being received and known. As the world is something made and given, it may analogously be regarded as an art-work which exerts, as does all authentic art, a moral force to respond to it (2.4.2 above). One manner of response is to add to the order of signs a work of human hands that discloses and shows forth truth. Any of the visual or literary arts could answer as such a sign, however there are several reasons why a poem may answer best.

Firstly, a poem captures the sense of the two complementary metaphors used of divine *poiesis* in the Genesis creation accounts: God speaking something new into the void, and God fashioning something new from extant material. These two modalities are echoed and synthesised in literary poems: something new is spoken into the world using inherited, existing language. Secondly, poems lend themselves to different modes of transmission. They can exist in oral or written form, the latter making rigid boundaries between visual and literary arts impossible to sustain. The visual arrangement of words on a page can be consciously exploited for poetic effect, as is particularly the case in two of the poems considered below: R. S. Thomas' 'The Annunciation by Veneziano' (5.6.1) and Les Murray's '*Pietà* once attributed to Cosme Tura' (4.5.3). Thirdly, poems interact differently with the bodies of their auditors or readers than do, for example, the visual arts. Whether heard or read, the material of the art-form - words - penetrates the recipients. A poem becomes an enacted presence in the act of utterance, becoming 'corporeal and corporate - *incarnate*'; a descriptor used of sacramental liturgical prayer.<sup>217</sup> During either manner of its transmission, a poem participates in the

---

<sup>217</sup> Fergus Kerr, "The Need for Philosophy in Theology Today," *New Blackfriars* 65, no. 768 (1984): 253.



fluid present; the *now* of its corporeal instantiation. A poem recited aloud becomes an agent of real-world change through the mediation of its orator. The oscillations of spoken words disturb the air, passing through the reader to anyone within auditory range.<sup>218</sup> In being spoken forth, poem and performer form a unity of the two in a performative analogue of John Paul II's 'spousal unity.' The performer's body mediates the work, poem vivified in the instrument of its realisation. Supremely, a reader can become more than a poem's mediator, so fusing with it as to seem to become its very embodiment.

Finally, a poem conforms to, and instantiates the characteristics John Paul identified as being constitutive of personhood. John Paul's use of metaphors: of the body speaking its own language which can then be read, acknowledges a connection between *body* and *language*, where *body* equates with *text*. If the body can be thought of as a text, the most apposite would be, I suggest, a poem. The reasons for thinking so are that poems are open, not closed texts, which encourage, by their presence, interaction with others who read and contemplate them. Owing to the evocative and memorial aspects of poems, they embed others' voices within them, these voices forming the background, context, and extension of the poem. Intra-textually, a poem's words are ordered to relationality. A poem, like a person, is sheer gift, fulfilling no utilitarian function. Its orientation is outward-facing, which can be parsed as other-centred. This is implied in saying that a poem is a response to something *out there* in the world. The *sine qua non* of a poem is to transcend its own limits, reaching out beyond itself.

This transcendent quality aligns it with theological enquiry which is also concerned with *reaching beyond* to arrive at truth. There follows a series of readings of poems, all of which were written in the second-half of the twentieth century at a time of escalating cultural challenge, both secular and ecclesial, in the West. They are poems written in the lead-up to, and aftermath of, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) when the Roman Catholic Church reassessed its ecclesial identity and its relations with the wider world. The subject-matter of each poem deals in some way with the

---

<sup>218</sup> Plotinus (AD 204-270) noted that as spoken words disturb the air they fall into the category of meaningful action. See R. A. Markus, "St Augustine on Signs," *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957): 65.

motherhood of Mary, all bar one dealing with either her call to motherhood (Annunciation) or its tragic conclusion (*Pietà*). The one exception is Tric O’Heare’s poem which engages critically with the Roman Catholic Church’s handling of the Mary figure.

While all these poems deal with Mary, the focus of this thesis, this does not predetermine what may be said about them theologically. Poems are a way of responding to something truthfully. Rowan Williams uses the metaphor of the ‘pressure’ phenomena exert to articulate something that has not before been adequately perceived or expressed. A poem is a form of linguistic reflection, formed with the intention of opening out perception and perhaps growing understanding. The readings are given as case studies of the thesis claims, and while they are reflected upon theologically, they are approached agnostically. This open-ended approach does not commit in advance to a particular way of seeing, nor to arriving at a particular conclusion. The close textual analysis given to the poems gestures to every aspect of a work of art being relevant to the overall.<sup>219</sup> The readings look at the treatments given not only in terms of literary criticism (form, linguistic devices, organisation; the *body* of the poem) but by making associative connections to theological ideas, scripture, doctrine, practice and authorial autobiographical material. This is an approach of observant engagement.

## **4.1 Annunciation poems**

### **4.1.1 Edwin Muir, ‘The Annunciation’<sup>220</sup>**

Edwin Muir’s lyric, ‘The Annunciation,’ was published late in his life in the 1956 anthology, *One Foot in Eden*. It is a contemplation of the moment of the Incarnation portrayed as a state of ecstasy with a strong focus on the physical. While there is an angel, it is an angelic presence as embodied as the unnamed Mary’s own: it has a face, it gazes, and it experiences bliss and rapture. The central conceit of the poem is that the reader is accompanied and directed by the narrator to ‘See [...] see.’ The urgency of the double imperative suggests both voyeuristic

---

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1960; reprint, 1964).

<sup>220</sup> Edwin Muir, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 64.

watchfulness, and a pedagogical instruction to look more searchingly than superficially so as to ‘see’ with understanding. The word glances upon the range of differing types of sight: physical, imaginative, enhanced understanding (insight), the illumination of faith, the privileged visions of a seer, and vicarious sight through, for example, reading. The seemingly ordinary injunction to ‘See’ is an invitation to see that which, in its totality, only the eye of God beheld: the Annunciation event. The Lucan gospel account, in as far as it is historically accurate, would have been reliant upon the historic Mary to have furnished the details. The poem is an extended invitation to see into and beyond what is usually available to sight. The imaginative co-operation with the scriptural account becomes a type of enhanced sight, the result of slowed- down reading.

An injunction to see also engages with aesthetic theory. Muir’s is a quietly contemplative poem. Meyer Abrams, in his essay looking at the antecedents of late twentieth-century attitudes to art, identifies the ‘contemplative model’ as dominant and characterised by disinterested attention, ‘without reference to anything beyond its [the art work’s] own bounds, and for its own sake.’<sup>221</sup> The end of art, so this model holds, is to exist ‘for our disinterested contemplation.’<sup>222</sup> Abrams, mindful that this model, now taken for granted, once constituted a revolutionary volte in attitudes to art, traces the lineage of the change through the eighteenth century. The Earl of Shaftesbury wrote that the prototype for his espousal of disinterested contemplation was Christian as well as Platonic.<sup>223</sup> Contemplation without any self-interest or utilitarian intent is theologically grounded in ‘the absorbed contemplation of a metaphysical absolute or deity whose perfection consists in being totally otherworldly, serenely self-contained and self-sufficient.’<sup>224</sup> Muir seems to draw upon such theologically-grounded theoretical aesthetics. His poem is structured as a

---

<sup>221</sup> M. H. Abrams, "Kant and the Theology of Art," in *The Fourth Dimension of a Poem and Other Essays* (New York: Norton & Co., 2012), 152.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 171. Although he does not offer such a connection, the two other aesthetic models Abrams mentions, the ‘construction’ model and the ‘contemplative’ also seem to have an ancient theological antecedent in the Genesis creation narratives; the earlier account of the artisan God whose creation is a *poiesis*; the later account the contemplative God who repeatedly pauses to attend to His creation which He sees is ‘good.’

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 188.

double vision, the reader-viewer enjoined to contemplate the girl and the angel who are themselves lost in self-forgetful contemplation of each other. The poem gives itself as a window to be seen through, or a portal through which another dimension can be visually accessed; the skill of the poetic composition allowing the poetic subject to become the object of attention.

Muir's first-stanza introduction to what follows, the poetic heart, places the event in the world: angel and girl are 'met' and 'Earth was the only meeting place.' Muir is earthing the prototype of the picture he draws in words. This is not a spiritualised account of the Incarnation; not a case of the Word-made-flesh being here made word again.<sup>225</sup> This is Incarnation in the materiality of life seen and lived. Muir in his autobiography recalls the United Presbyterian Church he and his family attended in Orkney as being bare and austere: 'It did not tell me by any outward sign that the Word had been made flesh.'<sup>226</sup> Many years later on a work posting to Rome he was struck by the contrasting approach to Christianity as seen in ecclesial art, architecture, and cultural behaviour. He particularly mentions having been entranced by a small exterior domestic wall plaque of the Annunciation which would seem to have been the immediate inspiration for his poem.<sup>227</sup> He describes the image showing girl and angel 'as if they were overcome by love'; that they 'gazed upon each other'; and that this representation of intense human love 'seemed the perfect earthly symbol of the love that passes understanding.' He was much attracted to this earthiness which in his childhood island would have been thought 'a sort of blasphemy, perhaps even an indecency.'

Muir's poem closely follows this description. He avoids denominationally contentious terminology such as *virgin* in talking of Mary and presents her and her angelic visitor as young lovers. The direction of travel has been from 'beyond the shore of space' to Earth; to the realm of the 'embodied' ones. Muir's metaphoric connection between space and the seashore

---

<sup>225</sup> 'The Word made flesh is here made word again' appears in Muir's poem, "The Incarnate One" (l.8), Muir's critical commentary upon Calvinist Protestantism that he sees as disincarnating Christ, who becomes 'The fleshless word' (l. 22) and 'the abstract man' (l. 28). Muir, *Selected Poems*, 66.

<sup>226</sup> Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1993), 273.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

transfers the place of liminality where land meets sea to the 'place' where planet meets vast void. By the poem's penultimate line, the *deep* of 'deepening trance' has reprised the metaphor of the sea, making their locked look of love an allegorical cosmic meeting-place between spheres terrestrial and celestial; a wholeness enacting the hoped-for reunion of creation. The comfortable harmony with modernity of the second line, 'Earth was the only meeting place,' becomes by stanza's end the provoking chords of ancient story; Earth inhabited not only by physical beings but by 'The eternal spirits.' Earth, as with the Orkney Island Muir was born into and raised on, is now 'a place where there was no great distinction between the ordinary and the fabulous.'<sup>228</sup>

It is the unabashed holding gaze between the two that has effected the transfer of the earthly into the heavenly, and vice versa: 'heaven in hers and earth in his.' Mutuality is so much the dominant register of the encounter that it is this quality which secures the sense of Mary's *fiat* which is not articulated. Muir's Mary is one equal in dignity to the angel, with an equal status as subject as registered by the repeated use of the genitive plural: 'their limbs,' 'their deepening trance,' 'their gaze.' There is no sense of hierarchy, nor is Mary over-awed as in, for example, Elizabeth Jennings' imagining of the event (see 4.4.3, following). Muir's poem avoids a structure of potential dominance and submission. Mary is not the recipient of any imperatives. Muir adumbrates a quietly intense eroticism in the meeting. In rapt contemplation of each other, speech is disengaged, each finding the suspenseful tension one of 'bliss' and 'increasing rapture.' Although the reader is expressly not to assume sexual consummation, as this bliss is 'strangest strangeness' which 'from their limbs all movement takes,'<sup>229</sup> there is nevertheless a discreet hint of coital climax in the trembling of each angelic feather. The allusion is reinforced by its placement. The climactic line being the stanza's last, the stanza-break immediately following

---

<sup>228</sup> Elizabeth Jennings, "The Uses of Allegory: A Study of the Poetry of Edwin Muir," in *Every Changing Shape: Mystical Experience and the Making of Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996), 149.

<sup>229</sup> Abrams cites Plotinus who wrote of the contemplation of Absolute Beauty that it entailed a surrender of the self: "the soul's peace, outside of evil [...] here it is immune [...] He is become the Unity [...] no movement now, no passion [...]" in a passage that could readily be ascribed to Muir's poem. Abrams, 168.

functions as a post-coital deliverance, or bliss. When read aloud, the sound qualities of the aspirated *hs* ('He's come to her') and *fs* ('From far beyond the farthest star / Feathered [...]') with their exhaled air, mimic in sensuous fashion the exhaled breath of the Holy Spirit now breathed out into the womb-world.

Even within this blissful encounter, there is the immediate intimation of darkness and difficulty. Entering the world means entering the constraints of time, a theme Muir returns to repeatedly in his poems. Here is where 'the destroying minutes flow,' the entrapping linearity of time further suggested in the footsteps that 'Pursue their unreturning way.' They, in turn, find their context within 'Sound's perpetual roundabout.' In these two images, Muir has implicated the whole of humanity, whether time is conceived of according to a phallic, linear trajectory, or to a feminised circularity. Time's tyranny, whether of the inexorably passing, or of the repetitively futile, is conquerable, though. While the 'unreturning' footsteps do move away, holiness passed by unawares, Muir's use of 'footsteps fall' works to suggest how the world has been restructured. The use of 'fall' entails a mental return to Eden, from whence all footsteps are *fallen*. The footsteps sound 'Outside', though. Inside the room, womb of the world, time is suspended as what has fallen into this room is the angelic representative of eternity. The retreating footsteps, immaterial trace of human presence, are registered at the very moment when God realises Himself as material Presence. Now the extemporal world is nested within the temporal world of 'destroying minutes' and the 'Outside,' thereby redeeming it from within. Muir further complicates this relationship. The stanza dealing with the 'Outside' is placed between the stanzas dealing with the protagonists in the room where history is being restructured by eternity. By the final stanza, time has become eternity in anticipatory inauguration of the eschaton: 'the endless afternoon.' The relation between time and eternity as expressed within the poem's stanzaic structure is that of a holding within or a mutual 'enfolding',<sup>230</sup> a notably maternal image.

---

<sup>230</sup> Malcolm Guite uses this word to describe how reason and imagination, two ways of knowing, are 'mutually enfolded'. Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry : Theology and the Poetic Imagination*, Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 12.

The normality of the ‘ordinary day’ into which the footsteps sound suffers in comparison with the silent intensity that has preceded it. Within that inner room, life pulses; each line one of four iambs, the pulse of a heartbeat. The strong propulsion is reigned in with ‘Shine steady there.’ The two monosyllabic words steady the line which, while also one of four iambs, needs for the sense the intonational stress to fall equally upon each word. The stop mid-line and the altered spoken rhythm mean form enacts content; movement halted to a steady presence. The contrast between the inside space of the second stanza and ‘Outside’ of the third is registered in the altered rhythm. In a display of rhythmic dexterity, Muir echoes the sense of the outside’s fallen ordinariness by altering the pulse of the lines to trochees whose long-to-short reverses the short-to-long of the preceding iambs. In this realm of damage (‘battered tune’) and non-advancement (‘perpetual roundabout’) the ordinary and the fallen have become conflated. Owing to the Incarnation, though, ordinariness has been reconfigured to that originally envisaged by the Creator. A redeemed and expanded sense of ordinariness upends any modern sceptical gloss on the dogma of the virginal conception: it is the fallen, reduced expectations of what constitutes ordinariness that needs reconfiguring. To reject the possibility of God’s extraordinary intervention in the world through Mary is to persist in a reduced vision that confuses ordinariness with only the rational and the scientific, allowing no room for the possibilities of a dream-like, mystical ‘trance’ of love. The inauguration of a restored, enhanced ordinariness is signalled by the initially separate realms of heaven (‘angel’) and earth (‘girl’) being conjoined as ‘These’ by poem’s end.

Muir challenges the pre-occupations of modernity: objectivity, scientific enquiry and materiality. Music according to this scheme can only be accounted for inadequately as ‘numbered octaves.’ Modernity’s systematic analysis cannot render a full account of the poetry of music (nor of words). The damaged instruments of a lapsed creation are antitheses of the silent absorbed couple. In the poem it is the mythical world that invites and sustains reader interest; its strangeness not wholly unfamiliar as it images the strange fascination of romantic love. It is the ‘Outside’ that is the distraction. This pattern follows that of the Matthean Jesus who, when twice questioned by the Pharisees about marriage practices declined to answer according to their terms

of current practice, instead redirecting them to the Genesis creation myth, a move which iterates that echoed in Muir's poem, from the 'Outside' of the ordinary world to the inside of God's, or from the prosaic to the poetic. John Paul II also follows this move, beginning his theological anthropology with the myth (TOB 1-4) read as the key by which the contemporary social world is unlocked. Muir's own autobiography consciously followed a similar path. He wrote of trying to locate one's individual life ('story') within a larger more transcendent frame ('fable'), even calling the first version of his autobiography, published in 1940, *The Story and the Fable*.<sup>231</sup>

This approach directs Muir's treatment of the Annunciation. Luke's gospel gives the only scriptural details of the event. Their inclusion attests to his interest in the 'story' of this part of Mary's life as this knowledge reveals what it is to be human before God. It is this revelatory inner truth that Muir would call 'fable', as distinct from what he calls the 'dry legend' of outer facts, such as one's appearance or routine life.<sup>232</sup> In his poem, although he presents the encounter as one of romantic love, he has no interest in the usual motifs of the genre, such as eulogising the beloved's features or particular qualities. On the contrary, Muir is taken with the quality of recognition and appreciation between 'girl' and 'angel' and what this will mean in terms of reshaping the fable of man. In not naming her or identifying her by any of her honorific titles, she becomes any young woman in the throes of romantic love. The noun also has historic pedigree as one of the few details about the legend of the historic Mary that could be stated with a degree of probability is that she may have been very young at the time of the Annunciation. In first-century Palestine girls tended to be betrothed at puberty, which may have meant around the age of twelve.<sup>233</sup> If this were so, then irrespective of whether her body had reached the menarche, she would have been considered by most to be in the transitional state between girlhood and womanhood. In this hinterland she would culturally have been under the protection and authority

---

<sup>231</sup> Muir, *An Autobiography*, xi.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>233</sup> A minimum age of between twelve and thirteen years for a girl's betrothal was later established by rabbinic decree. Kilian McDonnell, "Feminist Mariologies: Heteronomy/Subordination and the Scandal of Christology," *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (2005): 537.



of a man, making her personal and individual encounter all the more striking. Within Muir's poem, her girlhood suggests the liminality of the teen years where romantic love can be experienced with heady intensity. The locked gaze of love, anticipatory of (or memorial of) the holding gaze of mother and newborn, is so irresistible that the angel foregoes his freedom to leave. The final line captures the single-sighted intensity of focus upon the face of the beloved, each participant eager to prolong beholding, unable to see the other enough. The locked gaze will necessarily be broken when the angel goes but the relationship has been established as one founded on authentic reciprocal love which implies enduring faithfulness. The interlocked gaze is an immediately recognisable image of creaturely love, (here analogical of divine-creaturely love), but it is more than this. As with a kiss, the interlocked gaze is simultaneously sign, signifier and signified. Implicit is the equality in dignity of the participants. Love is in this sense, non-hierarchical. Image (creature) and original (divine) are restored to perfect register, communicating through the intense silence of their mutual delight.

#### **4.1.2 Noel Rowe, 'Magnificat: 1. Annunciation'<sup>234</sup>**

Australian poet, Noel Rowe (1951-2007), published his suite of five 'Magnificat' poems in his first full-length poetry collection, *Next to Nothing*, in 2004. Under the rubric 'Magnificat,' he sequences the key events of Jesus' life: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, from the imagined perspective of his mother. The meta-title serves to link the joyful and the sorrowful events within the attitude of trustful praise and steadfastness shown by Mary in Luke's gospel. In their earliest published version, in *Wings and Fire* (1984), Rowe, then a Marist priest, stated in the preface that his reason for writing the suite was to answer modern nostalgia for a sense of the transcendent. Rowe, *contra*, suggests modernity's loss is of a sense of immanence. He wrote the poems to 'set up a dialogue between the presence of Mary in the gospels and her presence, "hidden and as it were unknown" in the modern world.'<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Noel Rowe, *Next to Nothing* (Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2004), 31.

<sup>235</sup> Noel Rowe, *Wings and Fire* (Hunters Hill: Marist Promotions Team, 1984).

Rowe sought to realise this aim by anchoring his poems in the mundane details of ordinary life, and foregrounding Mary's presence and voice. The first of these methods is uncontentious. A sense of immanence is restored by Rowe's inclusion of sensible details: the play of light on the chair, the cutting of vegetables for a meal, the sounds of children playing. Rowe's Mary displays sensory awareness that codes spiritual sensitivity. She registers the subtle alterations of her immediate environment such as the attenuation of the light 'just letting go the wooden chair' but Rowe's deployment of the motifs of light, wind and silence do more than demythologise the event. Mary's sensitivity is directed to the natural signs that manifest the presence of God in scripture: light, wind and silence. The light's movement marked as a gesture of release subtly signals the movement not only of sun but of Son. The courteous and restrained 'breeze [...] waiting to come in' is the self-effacing Spirit of God who 'drew back' to 'let silence come in first.' This is the One who makes known the Son (cf. CCC 687). It is because of Mary's receptivity to the subtle presence of the Spirit that she is able to discern the presence of the living 'silence,' the paradoxical manifestation of the Word, the utterance of God. Having God's Presence signalled in mundane earthly life liberates and elevates ordinary life, the vehicle through which divine immanence is disclosed. Daily life can be saturated with God.

The second of Rowe's methods, the poetic conceit of giving Mary the narrator's voice, is more problematic. While the device uses the spare biblical account to advantage, exploiting the latitude it leaves for imaginative infilling of its narrative gaps, it opens up political difficulties associated with gender. In presenting all the words of the poem as ostensibly Mary's, Rowe is open to a charge of gender imperialism because he is a male purporting to speak not only on behalf of, but as, a woman. Rowe's strategy to redress the masculine bias of Christian scripture and tradition by making Mary the interpreter of her own life, is open to a charge of continuing the appropriation of women's stories by men.

Rowe himself was not oblivious to such a possible charge. In a critical essay first published in 2007,<sup>236</sup> Rowe tackles the question of the relationship between story, author and ethics. He argues that it can still be ‘considered honourable to write on behalf of others’<sup>237</sup> as imaginative empathy used to fashion a character always leaves space that acknowledges such empathy as analogical, a “‘something like”,<sup>238</sup> ‘not an exercise in complete identification.’<sup>239</sup> In terms of gender politics, he is not attempting to pass as a woman, as he is not making a claim to be one, nor attempting to conceal his maleness. His imaginative empathy whereby he affects to speak in the first-person as another is a mental and emotional effort to inhabit another’s perspective without claiming to have erased the distance between that other and himself as writer. Rowe’s position here echoes that of John Paul II regarding the construal of the *imago Dei*; that an image is not the thing itself but indicative of similarity. As Mary is considered the image of complete humanity and the model of discipleship, identifying with her through imaginative empathy is a possibility for any of the faithful, irrespective of gender. Rowe’s own measure is whether any literary analogy is ‘imaginatively captivating, credible and satisfying,’<sup>240</sup> so providing a critical standard by which to evaluate his own analogical identification with Mary.

Rowe attempts to strengthen the sense of Mary’s agency by way of a risky strategy of depriving her of direct speech. While her articulation of willing acceptance of God’s intention has been expunged in this, the final version of his poem, the poem and its presentation of Mary is considerably strengthened in the process. The poem loses the bathos of his earlier version (‘I said, “Yes”,’)<sup>241</sup> and gains for the Mary character a sense of the fullness of meaning and longing which words seem inadequate to express. Karl Rahner has perceptively understood this as the incompleteness of human words; each word ‘is always, as it were, floating upon a deeper level of

---

<sup>236</sup> Noel Rowe, "'Will This Be Your Poem, or Mine?' The Give and Take of Story," in *Ethical Investigations: Essays on Australian Literature and Poetics*, ed. B Brennan (Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2008).

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.* Rowe quotes here from a 1985 Association for the Study of Australian Literature conference paper, “Speaking as a Woman,” delivered by Philip Martin.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>241</sup> Rowe, *Wings and Fire*, 8.

meaning which cannot be communicated.<sup>242</sup> Rowe has her *fiat* communicated through the desire of her heart, the *locus classicus* of the soul. This gives poetic expression to gospel strands where it is the desire of the heart which God discerns and judges (cf. John 2:25). John Paul II makes the heart's desire the subject of several of his TOB audiences (cf. TOB 45:2). It is the *heart* that prompts personal choices and actions.<sup>243</sup> The heart acts as metaphor for hidden desires and emotions. It is in a sense both *vessel* that contains the emotions and the organ that indicates and shapes the overall health of the organism. The desire of the heart, hidden to all except God, is metonymic of the person. Inner desires map a person's value system which in turn governs relationships with others and with God. This understanding informs the Sermon on the Mount, referred to in scores of John Paul II's TOB audiences.<sup>244</sup>

Rowe's decision to highlight Mary's heart draws upon the rich gospel associations between the inner and the outer person, or the spirit and the flesh, all of which is transparent to God. In re-imagining Mary's consent as the passionate desire of the heart, her assent is relocated to her inner-most personhood. This is an intensely intimate union of creature and Creator which Rowe's suggestively erotic analogy makes clear. The analogical relationship between erotic desire and desire for God is seldom invoked in association with Mary. This move lightens the load of her cathected modesty, aided by his transference of humility from the poetic Marian domain to the angelic. The panting repetition of 'my heart, my heart' (cf. Ps. 42:1) ardently 'wanting him' constitutes her assent. The present participles that follow give a strong sense of her agency: 'wanting,' 'reaching out,' 'taking hold' and strongly articulate the embodied nature of Mary's assent. Rowe's suggestion of God's fiery Presence as phallus is less a flirtation with pagan ideas than an invocation of the God of Israel appearing as a burning bush and a pillar of fire. It also draws upon

---

<sup>242</sup> Rahner, 8, 224.

<sup>243</sup> A cohort of Kurdish Jewish women aged 58-90 years, living in Israel, were questioned about their religious observance. While they had kept kosher and attended ritual baths when younger, they now viewed religion as 'a matter of belief in God, of having a "clean heart".' Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 79.

<sup>244</sup> The Sermon on the Mount is mentioned 155 times in TOB. Waldstein, index: Sermon on the Mount, 718.

the use of *knowledge* in Old Testament texts when speaking of the relations between God and His people, where *knowledge* draws upon what John Paul II calls ‘the very poverty of the language [from which] there seems to arise a specific depth of meaning’ (TOB 20:2).<sup>245</sup> In having Mary’s assent constituted both by her ‘wanting him’ and her ‘taking hold,’ Rowe is uniting the Western church’s focus on Mary’s being and the Eastern church’s commitment to her action, as equally determinative of her unique status.<sup>246</sup> Rowe’s image draws upon the biblical seam that identifies God as lover, most notably in the Song of Solomon.<sup>247</sup> Rowe’s deceptively simple presentation of Mary is not as straightforward as it seems. Here is Mary who, in her relation to God, is virgin, bride, wife, and mother (cf. 5.0 below).<sup>248</sup> Rowe has re-imagined the *fiat* so that it is no longer heteronomous of submission, with a Mary meekly obedient.<sup>249</sup> Here, *obedience* is closer to its Latin root of hearing, and making appropriate response, rather than following instructions from another.<sup>250</sup>

The astonishing series of transformations that the Annunciation triggers are veiled in simple syntax and spare couplets. The known ‘familiar things’ once transformed, are knowable in a different way. Mary’s mundane ‘I prepared a meal’ is transformed into a metaphor for the gestation of Jesus, food of the faithful. The symbolic weight now attached to ‘hitting wood’ is

---

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Hos. 2:22; Ezek. 16:62.

<sup>246</sup> Aaron Riches sees a link between John Paul II’s ecumenical interest in the Eastern Orthodox traditions and his earlier phenomenology (Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*) in helping the Latin Church towards a more positive construal of Marian virtue in her *fiat*. Wojtyła had sought to show how the person is a unity of ‘being’ (the Latin emphasis) and ‘act’ (the Eastern emphasis). Aaron Riches, “Deconstructing the Linearity of Grace: The Risk and Reflexive Paradox of Mary’s Immaculate Fiat,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (2008): 182-3.

<sup>247</sup> The canticle expresses the passion of God for His people and was influential in the religious lives of Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages. Green considers that for Rabbi Akiva, traditionally credited with including the book in the canon early in the second century, it constituted ‘the heart of revelation.’ Arthur Green, “Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context,” *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (2002): 3.

<sup>248</sup> The biblical literary allegory of the sacred lover crossed over into visual representations, reaching its zenith in the High Middle Ages in Europe, with images of Mary and the risen Jesus entwined in a lovers’ embrace. Two such are the fresco in the mother church of the Franciscans in Assisi, painted by Cimabue, circa 1272–1280, and the ‘Stella Altarpiece,’ painted in the early 1300s. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, “The ‘Stella Altarpiece.’ Magnum Opus of the Cesi Master,” *Artibus et Historiae* 22, no. 44 (2001).

<sup>249</sup> Feminist theological discussion of this issue is surveyed and analysed in McDonnell, “Feminist Mariologies.”

<sup>250</sup> Nancy A. Sell, “The Magnificat as a Model for Ministry: Proclaiming Justice, Shifting Paradigms, Transforming Lives,” *Liturgical Ministry* 10, no. 31-40 (2001): 36.

that of Calvary; Mary ‘at the table’ becomes the proto-priest of the Eucharist. The narrative simplicity belies the layered transformations in progress: raw ingredients into meal, maternal flesh into fetal flesh, Christic flesh into Eucharistic sustenance. This is liturgical ‘ordinary time’ made extraordinary through the irruption of the eternal God into the temporal order: the entry of God’s ‘silence,’ Mary’s response, and the conception take place in the interval between the toss and catch of a bone to a dog. As a framing image, it encompasses salvation history: the consequences of the original fall from grace (‘scarred’), the instigation of redemption (‘caught’), and the gospel pericope of the Syro-Phoenician woman (‘dog’),<sup>251</sup> so fully loading the ordinary with a sense of dense immanence.

#### ***4.1.3 Elizabeth Jennings, ‘The Annunciation’<sup>252</sup>***

Elizabeth Jennings’ 1958 treatment of the Annunciation also deals with it as a mystical event of union with God but unlike Muir, Jennings probes the difficulties that piety glides over and challenges any easy assumptions concerning Mary’s encounter. The assertive opening, ‘Nothing will ease the pain to come,’ resituates the event as one of high stakes which exacted a price of suffering from Mary. Provocatively, it introduces, while not committing to, the idea of natal pain, strongly echoed in the poem’s final line, ‘And great salvations grip her side.’ The *sensus fidelium* is that Mary was free from labour pains which had entered the world as a result of mankind’s fall from grace. It is a challenging opening as it makes central the negatives and darkness usually absent from, or obscured by, the joy of Christ’s conception. The following two lines follow a tradition in the writings of Western mystics of expressing mystical experience in the images of profane love, following the biblical precedent of the Song of Songs. Jennings firmly resists romantic expression or conceptions that would ignore difficulties and ambivalences. The intimation of sexual ecstasy is expressed in a troubling passive voice: ‘lets it have its way with her.’ The referent of ‘it’ is not articulated which allows for the unknowability of the encounter with God who is neither male nor female. The use of a now-historic colloquial idiom used of

---

<sup>251</sup> Cf. ‘[...] it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,’ Mk. 7:27.

<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Jennings, *New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002), 31-2.

fornication retains a problematic strain within the language, though, that the neuter pronoun does not eclipse. The ecstatic moment is repositioned so as to be secondary to the initial line of negation. At the summit of ‘Something’ happening, Jennings places ‘Nothing’ over it. Jennings seems to be consciously avoiding a shortcoming she perceived in Albert Camus which she later touched upon in her book of critical analysis: ‘for Camus ecstasy was almost always another name for escape or self-deception.’<sup>253</sup> Jennings, *contra* Camus, has ecstasy as momentary (‘now’) and as that from which she imagines Mary needing to ‘Take comfort’ and to move ‘from’; any idea of *escape* being reversed.

Jennings’ treatment of Mary’s passivity shows the negative aspect of a Marian piety which overly articulates her docility, reducing her agency to that of passive compliance.<sup>254</sup> She pursues this line of thinking with the image of ‘The angel’s shadow’ made sinister in light of the following, ‘as if he / Had never terrified her there.’ The angelic attempt to mitigate his behaviour ‘as if’ it had been other than it was, introducing a worrying implication of possible deception. While terror can refer to proper awe in God’s Presence,<sup>255</sup> its use here implies fearfulness made especially troubling by the male gendering of the angel. Submissive almost to the point of erasure, Jennings’ presentation of the Annunciation hovers around notions of entrapment which militates against Marian free consent. The angelic ‘shadow’ alludes to the ‘overshadowing’ of Mary in Luke 1:35, itself a literary allusion to the cloud that covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord that filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). Jennings reworks the *overshadowing* into one of intimidating dominance.<sup>256</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> Jennings, *Every Changing Shape: Mystical Experience and the Making of Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 15.

<sup>254</sup> Mary’s consent is stated positively in *Lumen Gentium*, chapter VIII “Our Lady”: ‘Rightly, therefore, the holy Fathers see Mary not merely as a passive instrument in the hands of God, but as freely co-operating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience.’ *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Jennings in her discussion of a poem of G.M. Hopkins, where she distinguishes the ‘terror of awe’ from ‘craven fear.’ Jennings, *Every Changing Shape: Mystical Experience and the Making of Poems*, 103.

<sup>256</sup> The association of ‘overshadowing’ with sinister implications is a reading strongly influenced by culture. In the Northern hemisphere it may be interpreted as darkly threatening but, as Elizabeth A. Johnson notes, within a Middle Eastern context of punishing heat and sun, it implies restorative respite. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 252.

Jennings keeps her focus resolutely on Mary. The newness of the Annunciation she locates within Mary herself: 'in her heart new loving burns'; an image which internalises the Mosaic burning bush. This is the new 'Something,' suggesting both a thing newly called into being through this new encounter and something already present but called forth from Mary's depths. This image modifies what seemed to be the assurances in the preceding lines: 'again returns,' 'old simple state,' and 'comfort from the things she knows.' Return for the person is an illusion, hence it is 'The furniture' and 'the things' that can be restored as they do not live nor change. The thing she has given for the first time causes her to probe her relationship with God ('how,' 'what,' 'whom') and to ponder her future. Jennings presses the strangeness of the event: God's manifestation paradoxically rendering Mary unable to pray; all prior certainties removed. Her induction into new fervour accompanies induction into alienation ('Alone'). Mary's imagining bypasses any mention of Joseph, reiterating her sense of solitude: 'by myself must live.' This solitude carries its own dark ambivalence in her exposure 'To all men's eyes,' linking with, and continuing, the unsettling associations from the first stanza. The mystical union she experienced inaugurates the *missio Dei*, visible in her developing pregnancy; Jennings foregrounding the element of public display usually absent from annunciations that focus on the intimacy of the domestic and private.

The linkage of 'strange child' with 'my own' implicates Mary's maternal relationship, and by extension, all such mother-child relations; the child being both of the mother and different from her. Motherhood is characterised as an uncomfortable encounter with otherness. The 'strange child' will need to be explored and decoded; his meaning not easily accessible. The recognition of an alien quality points to the distance existing between all persons, each one standing alone before God, even when within intimate and loving human relationships. It also implies a linkage of strangeness and the mother. The identification of oddity is not selectively focused outward towards the child but shows Mary's concomitant self-awareness: that she, as mother, is implicated in her child's strangeness. Motherhood entails an encounter with one's own self as other, suggesting its capacity to open the maternal self to greater depths of self-knowledge. Such



strangeness is weighed against the commonplace which provides the ballast to the ‘ecstasy.’ Within the daily world, the supernatural is parenthesised, just as are the ‘Announcing angels.’ Jennings’ handling of the Annunciation rejects pious romanticising which detracts from its real human dimension. The divine who is unknown and unknowable is not apostrophized but rendered as an unconfirmed myth, so the lower-case ‘god’ and the use of the indefinite article. With divinity sidelined, Mary as representative of humanity is ‘hungry both for certainty and for safety.’<sup>257</sup> It is the humanity of mother and son that occupies Jennings. Shadowiness is the governing trope of the poem. In her later appreciative essay on Edwin Muir’s poetry, Jennings writes of ‘the shadow side of his verse, a darkness that can never be entirely cast off. His work is affirmative, yes, but there are no easy answers in it.’<sup>258</sup> They are words that could constitute a self-assessment.

#### ***4.1.4 Bruce Dawe, ‘Mary and the Angel’<sup>259</sup>***

Bruce Dawe’s 1980s reworking of the Annunciation is a bleak parody. In his presentation of an impoverished and reversed encounter, Dawe prosecutes contemporary misuse of language and its effect on conceptions of personhood. The Lucan lowly annunciate becomes in Dawe’s poem, the annunciate brought low. Structured around an imagined dialogue between Mary and a Gabriel recast as ‘the high-school gynaecologist,’ Dawe observes each one’s differing relationship with language.

Significantly, ‘Dr Gabriel’ opens with a rhetorical question which neither expects nor seeks an answer. Dawe, as with Muir, uses ‘girl’ of Mary but to different effect. The doctor’s vocative, ‘the lucky girl,’ a parody of the angelic salutation, de-personalises Mary, reducing ‘grace’ to ‘chance,’ and signals an attitude of paternalism. The definite article mimics the singularity of her namesake but her specificity is then undermined as the article modifies a generic noun. ‘Girl’ here plays against Mary’s gynaecological maturity. Her physical maturity is inferred from her visit to the gynaecologist, yet she is subject to the authority and decisions of others, unable to

---

<sup>257</sup> Jennings, *Every Changing Shape: Mystical Experience and the Making of Poems*, 18.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>259</sup> Bruce Dawe, *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954 to 2005*, 6th ed. (Port Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Heinemann, 2008), 246-7.

determine her future and vulnerable to the manipulations and desires of others in the liminal state between clearly-designated girlhood and womanhood. The invocation of luck has immediate resonance for Australian readers of Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country*. The title of Horne's book passed into common parlance but in doing so, shed the ironic bite of the original. Horne's title is taken from the opening line of the book's final chapter: 'Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck.'<sup>260</sup> The allusion directed to Mary now appears with an ironic twist and a covert denigration.

In contrast 'the girl' asks two questions which are open-ended and signal a sincere attempt to glean understanding and engage in dialogue. She tries to interrogate the assumptions of the doctor ('What is it / makes you think I'm lucky?') in a reversal of Socratic dialogue. Rather than the master feigning ignorance in order to prompt students into formulating answers, Mary as enquiring student seeks answers from one 'thoroughly professional' who is quick with practised answers which are delivered as a series of unselfconscious ironies: the black pun of 'inconceivable joy,' the nihilism of 'tubal ligation,' the falsetto 'liberate your body' and the perversity of envisaging her gender as 'bondage.' Each alleged descriptor and claim amounts to an unspeaking of the body's language. The answers she is given sketch an inverted scheme of values where fortune is equated with disabling her body's fertility so as to avoid any [un]lucky pregnancy. Not only does this treat natural gynaecological maturation as disease needing cure, it is a direct inversion of the recurrent biblical trope where the fertility of God's people is equated with blessing; infertility with curse.

The doctor's language domain contrasts unfavourably with Mary's. He is blasé in using jargon ('superovulation,' 'laparoscopy') and resorts to journalese ('placed in a little petri dish,' 'frozen and then stored'). This message of the technical usurpation of conception is delivered casually, glossing over potential difficulties, such as the risk to maternal health of inducing 'superovulation.' The interpolation of a third-party into the generative union of Mary and her

---

<sup>260</sup> Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country: Australia in the Sixties* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Books, 1964), 209.

hypothetical spouse is not only undisclosed but implied not to exist with the claim that the ovum will wait 'for your spouse to fertilise.' In illogical and covert double-speak, any resultant embryo is simultaneously described as 'healthy' and subject to investigation for 'genetic abnormalities,' the fate of embryos who fail evaluation not raised. The doctor's language conforms to the type of political speech sharply criticised in George Orwell's 1946 essay, *Politics and the English Language*, being that of 'euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.'<sup>261</sup> The adjectival modifiers 'no-risk,' 'little,' 'healthy' resonate with positive associations designed to forestall closer critical enquiry. This is language used to circumvent questioning and to thwart communication. Orwell sees such political speech indicating a speaker's 'reduced state of consciousness.' This is signalled in the poem by the metastatic narration of the doctor (cf. his four-time use of 'and'), indicating speech made without conscious awareness of, nor interest in, its own shortcomings. Such political speech Orwell saw characterising 'the defence of the indefensible.'<sup>262</sup>

In the doctor's language world, words not only do not reliably mean what they say, they mean the opposite. The sterilized body hailed as 'liberation,' critically invokes the 'Women's Liberation Movement' of second-wave feminism. The word choice doubly misleads as the tubal ligation eliminates, possibly permanently, any future elected pregnancy, negating any idea of freedom. A future pregnancy attempt may rely upon a commissioned surrogate; hers the true 'bondage.' Hers is the unspoken and anonymous servitude which supports techno maternity. 'Liberation' and 'bondage' are also the key-words of extremist political propaganda which Dawe balances with the touchstone words of capitalism: 'option,' 'choice' and 'prefer.' The latter are political palliatives suggesting they serve a programme of freedom. It is, though, a faux freedom operating upon the fault lines of class, nationhood and economics. The historian and sociologist, Naomi Pfeffer has pointed out that the governing body of the UK's licensed fertility

---

<sup>261</sup> George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *Why I Write* (1946; repr., London: Penguin, 2004), 115.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

clinics, the ‘Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority’ (HFEA), allows a so-called ‘egg-sharing’ scheme where women undergoing IVF are offered substantial financial reductions on the cost of their treatment if they agree to ‘donate’ some of their eggs. An egg, though, cannot be ‘shared’ and a financial inducement nullifies the freedom of a gift.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, as demand for eggs in the UK by sub-fertile women far outstrips supply, IVF tourism to Eastern Europe and the Far East has grown; most eggs are sourced from women in developing or transitional economies with weak regulation, weak civil societies, corruption, and restricted access to healthcare. The physical manifestations of the body’s health and developmental stage, which constitute the silent speech of the body, become an unreliable indicator in this scheme; amenorrhoea indicating not sexual immaturity, nor pregnancy, nor menopause nor pathology, but intentional curtailment of the body’s potential to conceive.

The language scheme represented by the doctor and the one Mary is expected to operate within, is one that dominates by imposing control over both nature and vocabulary. Here ‘planned’ is promoted as the highest good. In an embedded inconsistency, the doctor’s advocacy for planning contradicts his reference to ‘luck.’ The elision of planning with luck distances the doctor’s advocacy from the Christian vision which is of a providential deity who actively intends (‘plans’) for each person’s life; the person then being free to co-operate with the divine intention. Planning without reference to, and inclusion of, God is the hallmark of sin. The imposition of a self-generated plan has implications for language. Poets consciously plan their poems, shaping language, choosing, honing and revising their words. This does not, though, give a full account of poetic creation which is craft but also art; a summoning and also a finding. Words are not only fashioned, they are waited for, discerned, recognised and received, so, *inter alia*, Les Murray’s ‘dreaming mind’;<sup>264</sup> C.S. Lewis of writing his Narnia stories, ‘Everything began with images’ which prompted him to ‘keep quiet and watch and they will begin joining themselves

---

<sup>263</sup> Naomi Pfeffer, "Older Mothers and Global/National Responsibilities," *BioNews*, no. 544, [http://www.bionews.org.uk/page\\_53936.asp](http://www.bionews.org.uk/page_53936.asp).

<sup>264</sup> Murray, "Embodiment and Incarnation."

up’;<sup>265</sup> Glyn Maxwell saying a poem can contain ‘words you didn’t expect, echoes you couldn’t foresee, matter you never chose.’<sup>266</sup> All are expressing a sense of participating in something beyond themselves and their own conscious planning.

The poem’s Gabriel is outside these mysterious bounds of poetry. The humanist scheme of the doctor is signalled by the suggestions of, but dissonances from, the gospel story. The troubling displacement of ‘hands like wings’; the Spirit trivialised to a residual allusion in the ‘dove-grey waiting-room’ from whence the girl is called to a consulting room where, ironically, she will not be consulted but disregarded. This misconceived, Cartesian dystopic annunciation bypasses the heart of its meaning: freely-given consent. Her assumed *fiat* is not a participation in God’s new creation but denial of it and resistance to it. The control which is allegedly hers, as seen in the thrice-repeated ‘you’ (‘you shall be given,’ ‘should you decide,’ ‘should you prefer it’) is a reductive and misdirected echo of the Hebraic superlative expressed as a threefold repetition. Power relations are inverted in the poem, the primordial power of giving birth now usurped by the controlling (male) power of specialist medical knowledge, man’s reliance upon woman to give birth now woman’s reliance upon man so she does not. Here is privation of word, deed and body.

Dawe’s poem is notable for situating his Mary within her social context, in contrast to the usual preoccupation with her personal holiness which can seem to bypass her formative religious inheritance. The broader social program is indicated in the (State?) provision of a high-school gynaecologist, of her mother accompanying her there (although she is little more than a cipher), and of Mary’s own slippage into the values of the world of which she is a part. Significantly, Dawe has Mary enquire about a future ‘partner’ rather than husband; her language choice already subtly signalling her absorption of the subliminal text of her social environment. Equally significantly, the doctor avoids talk of a husband, instead opting for the gender-free ‘spouse.’ Mary is named by the narrator, but not by the doctor. As naming is linked with

---

<sup>265</sup> C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1966; reprint, 1982), 41.

<sup>266</sup> Glyn Maxwell, *On Poetry* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 126.

attentive personalised care, her non-naming deprives her of dignity. John Paul II expounded upon dignity as a value intrinsic to the human person in twenty-eight of his Wednesday TOB audiences. Mary is linked in indignity to the nameless ‘breeder woman.’ The reductive terminology evokes the imaginings of mid-twentieth century science fiction, an example of which Mary has been reading in the waiting room. *Spaceways* was a children’s annual published in London and distributed throughout the British Empire. The characters were based upon toys sold in Woolworths stores, those stores being the primary distributors of the comics. Dawe implies similarly inter-related commercial interests between those parties invested in promoting teenaged contraceptive practice. Science fiction hailed science as the harbinger of progress where *progress* was seen in materialist terms, not to mention being cosmically imperialistic. The poem’s Gabriel is the messenger of such ‘scientism.’ The language of scientific procedures and conclusions are inadequate to encompass human experience as the nature of such language is to eliminate the ‘individual personality, purpose, passion, drama, and value’ of the human subject.<sup>267</sup>

Dawe’s free verse form facilitates the loose conversational style of the protagonists, its abandonment of the discipline of a more formal poetic form coalescing with the social practices he is critical of. His use of a wide range of language registers: archaic/mock biblical (‘When Mary had attained her fifteenth year’; ‘in the fullness of time’; ‘What is it makes you think [...]?’); rhetorical (‘aren’t you the lucky girl [...]?’); metastatic (cf. the doctor’s four-time usage of ‘and’); and informal (cf. the arch use of the abbreviation ‘i.e.’) collates all language types, implying the contemporary corruption of all linguistic expression. By poem’s end, Mary has no words of her own; effectively rendered linguistically sterile. Her muteness, expressed as ‘dumbly bowed’ displaces the expected ‘humbly’ of Christian piety and connects her with the animal world which cannot transcend itself in word.<sup>268</sup> She resists being misplaced in this way (‘tried very hard’), struggling to retain her personhood. It is an unequal struggle in a social context bereft of

---

<sup>267</sup> M. H. Abrams, “The Language and Methods of Humanism,” in *The Fourth Dimension of a Poem* (New York: Norton & Co., 2012), 98.

<sup>268</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Karl H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger, vol. 3, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 302.

grace where, in ironic reversal, she is not mother of the Word but locked within ‘the ultimate imprisonment of all realities which are not expressed in word.’<sup>269</sup> The language world that has defeated her is the antithesis of language which is open and generative, that is, poetic language. It is no coincidence that the doctor advocates infertility as his language world is non-generative. It is an opposition of word-worlds between those ‘which render a single thing translucent to the infinity of all reality’<sup>270</sup> and those which would ‘delimit and isolate.’ As representative of the poetic language realm, Mary’s imaginative capacity, signalled by the ‘what if?’ of her second question, has stalled by poem’s end, the glimmer of hope offered by her trying to ‘imagine’ extinguished by the past tense and defeated outcome.

Poems are open to the unexpected but hoped-for possibilities of words; to a shared creative relationship between author, reader and critic. Counter-intuitively, Dawe is one among many poets on the record as not seeing themselves as the ultimate authors of their poetry; that the words they seek find them.<sup>271</sup> Dawe sees a writer’s choice of language as necessarily ‘intuitive’ and that this ‘instinctual nature [...] should act as a corrective to any belief that the author knows best.’ Dawe identified his intention to maintain such openness: ‘I do not know the answers, and see my role being limited to the exploration of the questions.’<sup>272</sup> Such exploration does not foreclose critical interrogation, nor prosecution, of contemporary practices and the assumptions on which they rest. As the relationships within the poem have collapsed: mother silent beside her daughter, doctor inauthentically communicating, and the paradigm of relational intimacy, motherhood, no longer covenantal but contractual, so too have words. The ‘tubal ligation’ becomes that of words themselves where the conduits of transmission are severed so that communication becomes impossible. Words can no longer be conceived; imagination arrested and articulation gripped by

---

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Clive James, *Poetry Notebook 2006-2014* (London: Picador, 2014). James states that a poem is made, not found (57), yet can also allow for what Dryden called a ‘hit,’ or felicitous phrase that comes unbidden (132), and that when writing a poem, one must ‘wait for it to speak’ (207).

<sup>272</sup> Bruce Dawe, “Australian Poets in Profile 1.” Special issue, *Southerly* 39, no. 3 (1979): 242.

seizure. Possibilities for the world implode as the chosen mother of the Word is ultimately unable to deliver any.

## 4.2 Overview of Annunciation poems

Muir's Annunciation poem enacts an argument in defence of poetry as a different way of seeing. *Sight* as the governing conceit speaks to its being the prime metaphor for *knowledge*. In his poem, what is seen is what could not be seen other than as it is, through his poem. What the poem leads its reader to see is the value of the unhurried gaze which *takes in* the other, speaking to the pleasingly ingressive nature of sight when it is focused by love. This subtle endorsement of the poet's vocation makes a claim not foreign to the tradition. Pope Leo the Great (c.400-461) gave a nascent papal endorsement of the imagination as a potential spiritual and devotional aid in his Sermon 26, saying of the Annunciation that: 'not only our memory but somehow our eyes as well contemplate the conversation between the angel Gabriel and the wondering Mary.'<sup>273</sup>

When sight is concentrated, it can absorb speech, as in Muir's poem, which builds an image of silent, mutual contemplation. Muir's image resonates with Sarah Coakley's approach to systematic theology. Coakley advocates a contemplative model, such as that performed in silent prayer, because it does not desire mastery or hegemony, and avoids phallo-centrism.<sup>274</sup> Silence of this kind can open up possibilities for other voices to both speak and be heard. In Muir's poem, the silence of the contemplative two enacts a Heideggerian approach to poetry as that which shows the unsayable while showing that it can 'never be fully brought to language.'<sup>275</sup>

Muir's poetic vision anticipates by some two decades the importance John Paul attached to mutuality in male-female relations. In Muir's imagined scene, the issue of authority, in the sense of enforced domination or control, recedes to the point of irrelevance. He configures

---

<sup>273</sup> Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 308.

<sup>274</sup> Coakley, 51.

<sup>275</sup> Anna Strhan, "Religious Language as Poetry: Heidegger's Challenge," *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 928.



*authority* according to Sarah Coakley's description of 'non-coercive divine power.'<sup>276</sup> This then allows him to present Mary's obedience from a different perspective. He does not abandon magisterial teaching of her obedience and humility but understands it differently, as an outgrowth of love, which desires the other's best interest. When that other is God, the lover secures her own best interest incidentally while seeking that which God seeks.

Rowe's poem also draws upon *eros* as that which can direct to God and be turned to God; a theme detectable in some early Christian mystics which Sarah Coakley has sought to re-appropriate (see 5.0 below). Rowe's strategy is an especially risky one in his use of overtly sexual imagery. He succeeds in constructing an image that avoids the type of sexual hierarchy that compromises mutuality and succeeds, too, in presenting a Marian figure that is receptive but not passive, so establishing relational reciprocity.

In keeping with his stated aim of reclaiming the disclosive power of immanence, Rowe's poem opens up an implied contrast between the ultimate transcendent event which happened humbly, through immanence, and a contemporary world-view which he thought had lost faith in the possibility of ordinary life's being meaningful or truth-bearing. His poem presents the possibilities of finding poetry in the everyday; of reclaiming an imaginative eye that can see the potential of ordinariness. His poem evokes transformative vision by presenting a transformed vision, realised in his dense accumulation of evocative transformations where the ordinary (wood, table, meal, bone, breeze) become signs of more than they are, so becoming the very means of their own transcendence.

Jennings' poem is more overtly concerned with authority, in particular the question of heteronomy and the implications of this for personal freedom. Informed by a darker consciousness of what passivity and obedience can mean for a woman where the relational or social power dynamic is exaggeratedly skewed against her, Jennings' Mary teeters on the brink of being subsumed by Transcendence, in the presence of which her immanence appears dangerously powerless. Jennings' poem grasps the potential for the Annunciation to be read as sexually exploitative, viewing the gospel

---

<sup>276</sup> Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 5.

reading from an unfamiliar, unwelcome, perspective. For similar reasons, Sarah Coakley does not see the Lucan Annunciation providing the possibility of a feminist reading, as she, like Jennings, reads in it themes of fear, humility, and submission.<sup>277</sup> While Jennings reads fear as a negative affective state, a well-developed biblical thread also positively associates ‘fear of the Lord’ with wisdom (see Proverbs 9:10, reiterated in Ps. 111:10; Job 28:28, *inter alia*). While damaging humility that devalues the self has been identified in feminist discourse as more likely in women than in men, in as far as women have wielded less political and economic power,<sup>278</sup> its true meaning of having a modest assessment of self in relation to others is a necessary virtue for harmonious civic and personal relations. Jennings’ poem, though, evokes disquiet. Her poem refuses an easy account salvation’s beginning, suggesting instead the cost to the mother.

Dawe’s poem offers a critical appraisal of the currency of words in his post-Christian dystopia. As far as words are an expression of the mind’s judgement, rather than a morally-neutral attempt to express a concept,<sup>279</sup> then the person in the world is not held captive by it but forms mental judgements about all that is encountered. This ‘dimension of freedom it [one’s mind] has over its self-identification with the material images which solicit its care’<sup>280</sup> ensures each person’s moral accountability for choices made, whether those are linguistic choices or other. Dawe’s doctor is therefore morally accountable for his self-identification with a political scheme founded upon a distaste for the feminine potential of motherhood.

Dawe’s poetic world displays the consequences of abandoning a pattern of thinking which is governed by Truth as the origin and standard of all that is.<sup>281</sup> This alternative vision enthrones man (here, specifically *male*) as the manufacturer of life; an inverted vision that fails to generate a W/word in Mary, the woman who enthrones God, not self. The doctor’s words enact the distinction between expression (here, choice) and what is expressed (here, determinism), his words obfuscating

---

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1983).

<sup>279</sup> Markus, 80.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. Markus cites St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* IX.7.12.

the distinction.<sup>282</sup> The moral neutrality of determinism rejects freedom and responsibility.<sup>283</sup> Dawe's presentation shows how a key tenet of the Aristotelian and Classical traditions, that the practice of virtue leads to happiness, can be rendered null within a civil context that opposes happiness to virtue. Dawe evokes the social landscape of a 'New Cartesianism'<sup>284</sup> which reverses the direction of the relationship between technology and persons, hailing technology as such as the paradigmatic good. His poem presents the consequences to the self when *self* is conceived of as an independent actor whose interior state is all. The resultant loss is that *I*'s relationship with the exterior world, and even that *I*'s own body.<sup>285</sup>

### 4.3 *Pietà* poems

#### 4.3.1 R.S. Thomas, '*Pietà*'<sup>286</sup>

Images of the *pietà* are artistic fictions: imaginative creations of an extra-biblical scene which nevertheless resonate as being truthful and satisfying in terms of emotional register and narrative cohesion. The *pietà* completes the circle of Jesus' earthly life, supported by His mother. The image focuses upon the body in pain, where *pain* encompasses the total body, physical, spiritual and emotional, but where the physical is synecdochic. Intense bodily pain eradicates a person's capacity to speak and inverts the agency of the person: rather than the personal subject deciding what words to speak, pain provokes involuntary cries and groans. This reversion to a state 'anterior to language'<sup>287</sup> obliterates the volition, agency and power of the sufferer. Such deconstruction of the person is the *raison d'être* of torture.

This coalescence within the *pietà* motif of suffering, trauma, closure, and the annihilation of language made it a uniquely apt subject for exploration by the Welsh poet and

---

<sup>282</sup> Anne M. Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2015), 125.

<sup>283</sup> Cf. John Lawrence Hill, *After the Natural Law: How the Classical Worldview Supports Our Modern Moral and Political Values* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016), 196-200.

<sup>284</sup> Kerr, 258. Kerr attributes the term's coinage to John McDowell.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>286</sup> R. S. Thomas, *Collected Poems: 1945-1990* (London: Phoenix, 2000), 159.

<sup>287</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4; 49.

ordained Anglican, R.S. Thomas. At the time of the poem's composition, Thomas had been much pre-occupied by the demise of the Welsh language. Published in 1966 within a collection of the same name, academic M. Wynn Thomas sees the 'pathos of this linguistic crisis' evident throughout the collection.<sup>288</sup> The choice of book title makes a dramatic and inflationary connection between the loss of the Welsh language and the death of the foundational Word, intimating the former to be a cultural apocalypse that strikes at, or strikes out, identity.

The poem is notable for its unusual handling of the identities of the *dramatis personae* neither of whom is directly present to the reader-viewer. Thomas' is a curiously disembodied *pietà*. Eschewing the suffering bodies, Thomas instead foregrounds the 'untenanted' Cross of Protestantism. The real flesh-and-blood bodies of son and mother are only alluded to: 'the Body' and 'a maid's arms.' Anthropomorphised, Thomas' Cross 'Aches for the Body': dead wood paradoxically alive to the meaning of Christ's body. The yearning discomfort attributed to the Cross operates ambiguously, suggesting both the amorous and the maternal. Viewed as the latter, the attributes 'untenanted' and 'Aches' read as displacements of the post-partum and labouring mother. Wood rendered sensate is a mirror image of the gospel strand that exhorts the believer to 'die' in order for Christ to live in him/her. If indeed, 'dying is gain' (Phil. 1:21), then 'it is failure to be dead enough to receive the creative longing of Christ'<sup>289</sup> that curtails the effectiveness of putative disciples in realising Christ in the world.

The chiasmus that transfers inertness to the fleshly mother, whose arms are 'a cradle,' and animates the inert Cross, is a poetic strategy that not only anchors the poem but shapes it as a cross. While this arresting rearrangement is consonant with Christian theological understanding of the Cross event as reordering history, it is unsettling in its near total disregard of the mother. Thomas' giving the Holy Mother, embodiment of religious duty faithfully performed and costly maternal loyalty, only the briefest allusion may, in part, be attributable to an Anglican

---

<sup>288</sup> M. Wynn Thomas, *R. S. Thomas: Serial Obsessive* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 88.

<sup>289</sup> James Alison, *Broken Hearts and New Creations: Intimations of a Great Reversal* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 260.

attenuation (or absence) of Marian devotion, but biographical considerations also seem relevant. Barry Morgan relates that Thomas had felt smothered by maternal love and only at the end of his life came to think that he had judged his mother too harshly.<sup>290</sup> This seems significant for the poem's unusual contrast between the *adult* Cross ('tall', Sombre') and the son, now returned to childhood ('back in the cradle') in the dependency of death. While 'cradle' echoes Jesus' nativity at this occasion of new birth, it also uncomfortably infantilizes the grown son.

The use of the indefinite article in denoting Mary, who is unnamed, possibly implies an unattractive instrumental attitude to her. While 'maid' is technically correct to denote Mary's virginity, its use here suggests ambivalence to Mary as mother. Western painterly convention often portrays the older Mary as youthfully beautiful ('maid'). Thomas' usage connects with the trope, common in medieval popular piety, of Mary as the true spouse of Jesus; cradling arms equally applicable as maternal or spousal. Mary had historically been construed as Jesus' spouse because as true believer, she is the true church.<sup>291</sup> Having spoken of his own mother as having been possessive,<sup>292</sup> Thomas saves the poetic Jesus from this fate by giving Him into the arms of a mother whose youth he implies, subtly transfiguring her into His lover in a manoeuvre that assumes her to be of the non-possessive variety. Morgan cites two other Thomas scholars, Elaine Shepherd and M. Wynn Thomas, as each seeing in Thomas' poetic responses to paintings an erotic sensibility which, they surmise, may have been suppressed in the poet's life;<sup>293</sup> an observation which seems apposite in this context.

Thomas' poem lends itself to being read mindful of two of the original characteristics of man as identified by John Paul II: solitude and communion. The sense of solitude is especially acute both within the generic subject, where the son is alone in death; the mother alone

---

<sup>290</sup> Barry Morgan, "Kyffin Williams & R.S. Thomas – Attitudes to Wales and to Faith" (The Kyffin Williams Trust Annual Memorial Lecture, Oriel Ynys Môn, Llangefni, Anglesey, May 10, 2013).

<sup>291</sup> Marina Warner surveys the motif of the bride as the faithful community of God which Christianity inherited from Judaism. She locates the stirrings in the West of devotion to 'Our Lady' as 'sweetheart' to the tenth century. The ardent and widespread popular devotion was the result of the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century. See Warner, 122ff and 30.

<sup>292</sup> Thomas, 123.

<sup>293</sup> Morgan, "Kyffin Williams & R.S. Thomas – Attitudes to Wales and to Faith," 8–13.

in living grief, and Thomas' unusual handling of it. The focus of the poem is the Cross ('in the foreground'). Empathetic to the suffering victim it has lately supported, it is humanized with sensuous insatiability; desire not spent though having experienced the climax of the Word. A mere instrument in the Passion drama, its contact with Christ's body has been transformative, bestowing upon it a dignity and elevating it to almost human consciousness. Its voice has become pluralistic, expressing not only its own desire to recover the lost Christ but absorbing Christ's yearning cry of dereliction to the Father (cf. Mt. 27:46). Christ's cry of a desolate sense of abandonment is the cry of every person feeling her/his radical aloneness before God, and the amplification of the distance between God and creature as the effect of sin. The adjective, 'Remote,' marks this sense of psychic distance that during personal crises can isolate the sufferer from others. The Cross may long for Christ but re-establishment of communion is, for it, impossible. It stands, as does Mary in paintings of the scene, immobilised in heart-ache. Relationships within the world of the poem are fatally ruptured or unable to be realised; communion longed-for but denied: the relationship between witnessing and being a hind; the relationship between insensate wood that silently 'feels'; the relationship between the comfort 'Of a maid's arms' and being dead.

Thomas' *oeuvre* is characterized by a sense of solitude which can seem to thwart the communion he desires. Richard McLauchlan sees Thomas' poetry as marked by 'Holy Saturday theology'<sup>294</sup> which takes seriously the silence of the day between Crucifixion and Resurrection. The motivation is to not evade the difficulties posed by 'suffering, silence and absence' by allowing a Holy Saturday theology 'to stretch itself in new directions' allowing that 'It challenges, unsettles and problematises religious language and concepts.'<sup>295</sup> Christianity must contend with a foundational religious figure who is, in the usually accepted sense, not there. It is only with the resurrection event that this absence is understood as a transformed kind of presence hidden from

---

<sup>294</sup> Richard McLauchlan, "R. S. Thomas: Poet of Holy Saturday," *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 6 (2011): 976.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 978.

sight in the invisible presence of the Spirit, located within persons and within the consecrated bread and wine. In one sense though, this is not what believers see. What is seen is emptiness – the Cross ‘untenanted’ - and, as with Thomas’ poetic cross, what may be felt is unfulfilled longing and loneliness. McLauchlan sees the poetic medium as particularly suited to engaging the reader with both God’s absence and presence:

In the formation of a poem, where rhythm, enjambment and caesurae are integral to what the poet is saying, the spaces between words and the points at which lines end become crucial. The poet says something in the very act of forcing the reader to stop and breathe. The silence, implied by the boundaries that the poems set up as they ‘stop short’ of God, becomes a form of revelation as it witnesses to the fundamental freedom of God from the confines of human language.<sup>296</sup>

The hills as ‘Remote witnesses’ usurp the women who, in the synoptic accounts, stood at a distance from the Cross (Mat. 27:55; Lk. 23:49). Thomas had been witness to change in Wales he did not welcome, and perhaps felt himself to be remote in his linguistic isolation (although he learnt to speak Welsh, and wrote prose in it, he did not ever feel able to express himself poetically in it)<sup>297</sup> and in his quarrel with the seemingly inexorable advance of the English language in Wales. This side-lining of the real witnesses seems to express something of Thomas’ concern that the [Welsh] hills may be all that is left ‘the same’ once the local language has disappeared and so changed all else. The hills suggest the comfort of stability, permanence and reliability (‘Always the same’). Thomas disallows much sense of reassurance by their presence, though. Instead, he destabilises their chief characteristic, immobility, by transferring to them the jostling associations of ‘Crowd,’ intensifying associations of movement by using it as a transitive verb.

Thomas exploits the ambivalences latent in seemingly incontestable phrases and simple syntax. This is so in his opening line where ‘Always the same hills’ could imply comfortable

---

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 981.

<sup>297</sup> Barry Morgan, *Strangely Orthodox: R. S. Thomas and His Poetry of Faith* (Llandysul, Ceredigion: Gomer Press, 2006), 11.

recognition of the visual formula adopted in artistic depictions of the scene but could as easily imply a certain weary detachment: *same* in the sense of formulaic and unimaginative. The latter is consonant with Thomas'<sup>298</sup> own personal feelings of 'dislocation and displacement'<sup>299</sup> even from that part of Wales he had made his home at the time of the poem's composition. Repeated sameness can blunt appreciation and imply stagnancy. The repeated rituals of the church, structured according to the liturgical year, are deemed to be meaningful, rather than mechanically familiar, as reception of them can continually cast up new understandings and initiate the congregant more fully into what they disclose. Repetition of actions also improves and reinforces agility in performance of them, and it is repetition that engenders cognitive familiarity which strengthens recall. The opening line, then, raises questions of memory and memorial enactment: what they are, how they function, and how reliable they are. The sameness of the hills, as of the Christian salvation story, indicates a continuous present which is the tense used throughout the poem. The poem is therefore realizing in its own timelessness a small something of the excess of the Cross which, although an historic event of a particular time and place, exceeds its own historic realization. The sameness of the background hills, or of any of the story's other elements, provides reassurance that the story has been rightly remembered, the narrative faithfully transmitted. The narrative motifs have become ritualized through continual repetition and it is this that both transmits and establishes right memory.

Similar ambiguity inheres to the following 'still scene.' Stillness suggests both a serenity in which there is space to absorb, consider and expand in understanding, and the shocked stillness immediately after trauma; the arrest of energy, movement and activity of life. There is a still surface calm to Thomas' poem, dominated as it is with sibilant sounds, but this sits above the sense of dense compression of meaning; Thomas' usual spare style pressed to its editorial limit. The phrase carries resonances of the painting genre *still life* which, through the presence of objects left behind, alludes to the absent people who have used them and who may again return, although

---

<sup>298</sup> Thomas, 90.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.



not in this field, in this painting. This simultaneous presentation of presence and absence has also been remarked by Richard McLauchlan as being characteristic of Thomas' 'Holy Saturday theology.' The image also has a temporal meaning: the 'still scene' is still current; available through the communal memory of the faithful and their central liturgical event, the Eucharist. This temporal dimension connects it with 'Remote' which, when considered in relation to the Eucharist, prompts consideration of ecclesial memorial enactments. The public sacramental repetition of the liturgical words and actions ensures that the ritual is held in common by all the faithful and keeps it open to constant inspection; its public openness its defence against idiosyncratic personal distortions and changes. It is upon the foundational memory of the initial contemporary witnesses, upon which the gospel account relies, that the faith now relies. Current adherents of the Christian faith who attest to the truth-claims of the story have inherited the memory from others. They can claim to be 'witnesses,' although not present at the historic event, even though 'Remote' as the distant hills, as the event of the Cross is not solipsistic, enclosed upon itself. Christology interprets Christ as the manifestation of the *Always-the-Same-One* so His person and action continues to be available in the present in a strongly memorial way. The 'still scene' is still current, available through the communal memory of the faithful; present in scripture, preaching and the sacraments.

The extreme leanness of Thomas' poetic style, realised in this *Pietà*, seems an outgrowth of a certain chariness about embodiment, perhaps reflecting ambivalence to the maternal. His *pietà* is a lament for the Word laid to rest. Yearning for a loved presence that has passed could be seen as the *leitmotiv* of the poem; Thomas having made Christ's words of abandonment his own. This Cross is substitutionary, but within the context of Thomas' poem, it substitutes for the human, the bodily and the maternal. The linguistic crisis of the Cross becomes, in Thomas' hands, a maternal crisis. The personal voice of his poetry was embodied in an encroaching language, foisted on him by a mother resented for this and personal reasons. His *de facto* mother tongue is not the language he 'Ached' for. The usual study of embodied pain and grief that the *pietà* evokes becomes instead a landscape poem allowing a quiet but intense detached meditation. His poem is a delicate cameo whose smallness of scale and tendency to silence paradoxically marks

the greatest language event of all. He chooses to render poetically the very moment when God's Word *cannot* speak. Thomas does not presume to speak for the now-silent God but contemplates instead the scene of dereliction.

#### 4.3.2 James McAuley, '*Pietà*'<sup>300</sup>

James McAuley's '*Pietà*,' composed and published in 1963, while more expansive in form than Thomas', is also a curtailed form. The discipline of the sonnet form restrains the expansive sentiment; its association with love poetry speaking to the content. The dense compactness is further reduced in this curial sonnet form, compression of vast meaning into small scale echoing the physical size and truncated life-span of the child. Contrary to Thomas', McAuley's focus is closely upon the mother. Emotional intensity is gleaned from the particular circumstances of this *pietà*: the death of a neonate one day old, and associating it through the title with the archetypal image of maternal suffering. The connection McAuley makes between the contemporary scene and the low point of the Christian story has precedent in the common artistic practice of using live models to pose as Mary and Jesus. By this association he suggests poetic mother and child both model, and inherit a relationship with, the prototypes. Neither protagonist is named in the poem. Identity is established via second and third-person pronouns, so making relationship the crux of the poem.

The poem is addressed to the dead neonate, the narrative enacting the kind of familial story- telling that informs and shapes the autobiographical identity of young children. Invoking the deceased as addressee situates the poem between tentative hope that the child continues to live in some way beyond biological death, the hope of Christian faith, and an agnostic position concerning hope where the direct address is an arresting literary device. The poem inclines to the former as the poetic memorial purports to be written one year after the death, the time when, in the Roman Catholic Church, a memorial Mass for the departed is traditionally requested. The 'Early into the light' denoting premature birth (which directly leads to premature death) by poem's

---

<sup>300</sup> James McAuley, *Collected Poems: 1936-1970* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971), 179-80.

end can be re-read more hopefully as realised *telos*: progression without delay into the divine light. There is no premature closure upon the pain and struggle of the event, though, as the associations of hope with 'light' are overshadowed with the following 'night,' 'dark,' 'loss' and 'wounds.' Dark following light reverses creation. Light, and its attendant associations with revelatory knowledge, is stalked and overtaken by dark ignorance and ineffable mystery.

With the essential outline of the narrative given, the second quatrain turns attention to the mother. The epic proportion of her small gesture is marked by the stately, weighty pulse and the rhythmic allusions to the Elohist creation narrative: 'a day and a night' and 'dark and deep.' While this contextualises even the de-generation of infant death within the creative generativity of God, it also implies the contrast between creation's original goodness, with its ordered scheme unfolding in timely manner, and the disordered entropy of the world poet, reader and protagonist now inhabit. The Genesis story narrates the physical manifestation of God's creative speech-act which is echoed in human generation. The divine resonances are, though, disturbed immediately by the dual linkage with its opposite: the numbness of bereavement.

Loss as a theme extends to the nature of words themselves. At the heart of McAuley's poem lies a paradox: that the mode of his memorial relies upon the shaping of words yet words are stretched to their limit, struggling to express the barely expressible. Having reported the farewell touch of the mother, negative expressions of incapacity follow: 'I cannot tell / I cannot understand.' Words and understanding chase themselves in a futile exegetical circle: articulation aids the process of understanding but the necessary words are elusive prior to some comprehension of what it is the poet would express. Words hover on the edge of inarticulacy, failing to offer more than the imprecision of 'A thing' for what has happened. The very capacity of words to act as witnesses is threatened if words are incapable of telling; existence threatening to collapse into a story never told. The depth and scale of meaning threatens to exceed the communicative capacity of words which are strained under intense pressure. In a critical analysis of McAuley's poetry, fellow poet and critic, Noel Rowe, sees in the 'connection between "farewell"

and “I cannot tell” a farewell to language, a despair of making meaning.<sup>301</sup> The material loss is not only ‘So physical’ but verbal as well. This calls into question the very viability of the poetic vocation. However, although words themselves teeter on the brink of defeat, the poem by its very existence refuses to concede the failure of language. Words struggle to authentically express the real but they are not abandoned. McAuley succeeds in marshalling words which attempt to tell. Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*,<sup>302</sup> identifies fear of the death of language as the primary fear of the present secular age. The power of language is off-set by awareness of the co-presence of fragility: that words can cease to resonate or reveal.

The languages of poetic expression and of bodily gesture each tremble with the loads they labour to bear. The pressing solitude of the mother, and the uniqueness of the passing life, exert an almost unsustainable pressure on vocabulary, reliant on repetition (‘Once only, with one hand’; ‘One touch’) to communicate emotional *extremis*, amounting to a verbal stammer;<sup>303</sup> words stalling in the presence of self-donating love. While it is in the nature of singularity that it struggles to support synonyms, words here fumble when faced with the impregnable authority of uniqueness: the existence of *this* child and *this* mother at *this* time; each reiteration marking the multiple modes of uniqueness. The weight of feeling attached to one-ness within the context already alluded to of the Genesis creation story, recalls the weight of solitariness registered by Adam in the Yahwist account where, in naming the animals, he understands himself to be essentially alone within creation (Gen. 2:19-20). The mother’s ‘One touch’ recalls the haemorrhaging woman in the Matthean gospel (Mt. 14:36), an ambivalent allusion as that woman’s faithful touch brought her bodily healing; this woman’s touch seals a death.

The poem sets up a triad of viewing relationships: mother of child, narrator of them both, and reader of all three; each set of onlookers moved by what is seen. McAuley’s watchful

---

<sup>301</sup> Noel Rowe, "James McAuley: The Possibility of Despair," *Southerly* 60, no. 2 (2000): 30.

<sup>302</sup> Cited in Carpenter, 139 ff.

<sup>303</sup> Against reductive claims about the capacity for human language to speak meaningfully about God, Karl Rahner affirms theology’s capacity to so speak, ‘even if it stammers in the attempt to do this.’ Karl Rahner, *Science and Christian Faith*, trans. Hugh M. Riley, vol. 21, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988), 111.

attention to the mother's touch invokes the relational nature of sight. This is the interest of Stephen Pattison in his book, *Seeing Things*,<sup>304</sup> where he argues for the reintegration of sight with the other senses, a concept he calls 'haptic vision.' Seeing in this way moves sight away from its association with a distant, detached, rational observer and into 'an intimate, visceral experience that touches and moves.'<sup>305</sup> Touch allied to sight provides confirmation of what we see, as with the Apostle Thomas' insistence upon feeling the wounds of Christ.<sup>306</sup> In Pattison's summary of the three core ways of conceptualizing sight: as perceptual experience, social practice, and discursive construct, it is the latter which threads its way through McAuley's poem, sight giving rise to 'metaphors, images and constructs that shape thought and thinking.'<sup>307</sup> The sight of the mother and her doomed child recalls the natal scene of the Virgin and Jesus, and the transposed scene at the foot of the Cross; the metaphors of birth and death coalescing in the images.

The sight of the touch the poem directs our intense gaze to, is one saturated with meaning for the direct participants and for those who participate indirectly through the poem. All bodies have a tactile sense which provides the metaphor by which we understand how emotions are *felt*. In the confluence of mother, dying new-born, and their tactile bond, is a universally-understood emotional register that needs no translation. The body and what it feels, physically and emotionally, is that which keeps us open or attuned to our existence; bodily sensibility being 'a mode of knowledge anterior to science, but not for that reason [...] necessarily inferior or "confused".'<sup>308</sup> The poem's existence attests to the possibility of being touched by another's pain, activating a *communio* of suffering: the mother's physical touch emotionally touching the poet-observer, the poem written in hopes of touching the reader's heart with some truth of the maternal body.

---

<sup>304</sup> Stephen Pattison, *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts* (London: SCM, 2007).

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>308</sup> David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 49-50.

The poem is careful to distinguish the modalities of this felt sense, wanting to give primary emotional weight to the gravity of the loss experienced by the mother. To that end, the narrator practises self-effacement by not using of himself a personal pronoun. A respectful distance is maintained between narrator and mother. The latter touches the inner reaches of mystery ('so dark and deep'); the image resonant with associations of female embodiment and of the incomprehensibility of God, in a way not accessible to the narrator who 'cannot tell'; 'cannot understand.' The pathos of the poem is deepened by knowing the biographical circumstances of its composition. McAuley and his wife experienced the death at one-day-old of their sixth child, a son, sixth months before the publication of the poem.<sup>309</sup> McAuley's care to preserve the distinction between the suffering mother and the paternal narrator is an act of humility that surrenders primacy to the mother's experience and acknowledges that it is not transferable across the gender divide. No attempt is made to colonise her experience nor assimilate it into something parental as attested by the line accents twice falling upon 'cannot'. The poem's emotional foundation is the commonality of the human experience of love and loss (the presence of the 'ones' now inviting thoughts of unity) while honouring the distinctively male and female embodiment of it. McAuley's poem is never presumptive; the reader is given an opening or glimpse into an intimate moment which speaks for itself in the space the poem cleared. The poem becomes more than its words. It is McAuley's own gesture of farewell to his son and of awe-ful admiration for his wife.

McAuley as poet, and the narrator's voice he constructs, make 'a kind of withdrawal,'<sup>310</sup> which Rowan Williams, in the published book of his 2005 Clark Lectures, maintains is essential for all artists. He means by this that the original object that provoked the artist must be accorded a respect and following from this, any artistic response will require 'letting the work develop in its own logic, its own space,'<sup>311</sup> an assessment invoking a strongly maternal-gestational

---

<sup>309</sup> Cassandra Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 204.

<sup>310</sup> Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Continuum, 2005), 161.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

image. Williams sees artistic endeavour as implying something *other* in the world; an elusive excess that the artist senses and tries to respond to. What his imagination produces is ‘not a self-contained mental construct but a vision that escapes control [...] a *dimensional* existence.’<sup>312</sup> Williams here is giving some account of a sense that artistic product is neither an act of domination nor of imitation. The artist is neither oligarch nor mimic but is obedient to some depth in the world, and that such depth ‘exists in relation to more than your [the artist’s] will and purpose.’<sup>313</sup> McAuley himself records a similar sense in the text of his 1975 lecture, ‘The Rhetoric of Australian Poetry,’ where he said of the series of small nature poems he was then writing that they ‘are a quite unexpected thing for me to find myself doing. I can say that I decided to do them and also that I found myself doing them.’<sup>314</sup>

Williams notes a convergence between theological thinking and artistic endeavours; in particular, that art helps understanding of creation. The Christian understanding of the world’s creation is rooted in a Trinitarian conception of God: the Father generating the Son who is both ‘utterly continuous’ and ‘utterly other,’ wholly drawn from the Father and wholly a re-presentation of the Father.<sup>315</sup> Reflecting upon this, Williams says that what is central to ‘making other’ is ‘dispossession, disinterested love’ which is the logic behind talk of the artist’s ‘withdrawal.’ McAuley adheres to these artistic requirements in this poem. He looks with eyes that perceive more even than the much they see; his choice of title an explicit indicator of dispossession and of consciously relating to another depth of existence. His poem is wholly drawn from his life and is re-presented so that it stands apart from his personal artistic endeavour, and from his personal biography. He transforms his personal loss into an act of creative *poiesis*; transposing loss into gift. McAuley fashions the poem so that it can become for the reader a Christic sign of contradiction where, in the death of an innocent, God, who is Love and Life, can be discerned. In personal

---

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> James McAuley, *Poetry, Essays and Personal Commentary* (St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1988), 115-6.

<sup>315</sup> Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*, 161.

correspondence to fellow poet, A.D. Hope, McAuley wrote of how the grief shared with his wife drew them closer together and became profoundly life-affirming: 'the loss became an occasion of extraordinary opening up of sealed off depths.'<sup>316</sup>

McAuley's detached narrator-viewer focuses on the mother's act of attachment and the piercing handicap of her being able to use only one hand instead of the expected full maternal embrace. In the touch is embedded loss. There is also another dimension suggested through the separation and maternal solitude. The laying on of hands is one of the mediations of the Christian sacraments used in the rite of ordination and the prayer for healing and wholeness. The mother's touch suggests a sacramental communion expanding and complementing the action of the individual by linking the mother with the presence and mediation of the church. The central image and founding event of the church, the Cross, is invoked in the last two lines.

McAuley structures the final lines so that the expected third quatrain is reduced to a tercet, the line reduction realising in its own mode the central line: 'So physical a loss.' What would have been the quatrain's final line, 'She had of you to keep', slips down to become the first line of a second tercet, adding itself to what would have been the expected final couplet. This is a second physical realisation within the lineation of the word-sense. The enjambment of the line end: 'that was all' and the next line: 'She had of you to keep,' has travelled not only to the following line but across a blank white void. Her personal memorial of her child is now lodged beside the Cross, the place where Christian faith sees life astonishingly springing from the site of death. The ambivalence of the Cross is retained in the metaphoric field of 'wounds' and 'terrible,' and their associations of knife, blade, and sword, further alluding to the Matthean words of Jesus: 'I have not come to bring peace but a sword' (Mt. 10:34). Hope is embedded here, too, as in the preceding line in the gospel the disciples have been exhorted to be unafraid, even in dying, as contrary to visible evidence, they will live on. The Cross' capacity to wound is transcended by its capacity to bring transformative healing. The tonal shift occurring with 'Clean wounds' carries

---

<sup>316</sup> Pybus, 204.



associations of holiness, wholesomeness, hygiene, and purity. These are wounds from which it is possible to make a sound recovery. This surgical action of God is manifest in the poem where the poet-surgeon exposes what is ordinarily hidden from sight. The Cross as scalpel both opens up a greater depth of sight via exposure and detachment and implies post-surgical closure, so the Cross as stumbling-block which closes understanding. This is not the Cross as an abstract idea of renewal. It actively accompanies and carries with it the love and pain of *this* mother, her particularity of suffering honoured as she and her experience are lodged under the protective defensive bastion ('keep') of the Cross.

McAuley's struggle with the fearful fragility of language has been reclaimed as an ultimate good, part of that creation which God declared 'good.' Our contingent language marks us off as different from, and dependent upon, the fullness of language who is God. Our *telos*, though, has begun: our contingent selves and language already taken up with God's creative Word into the Incarnation.

#### 4.3.3 Les Murray, '*Pietà Once Attributed to Cosme Tura*'<sup>317</sup>

Les Murray's *pietà* poem is a response to a painting of the subject by the early Renaissance Venetian painter, Cosme Tura (1430-1465). The painting is a springboard from which Murray ponders connections between *story* and *fact*, and the language used to express them. Murray's opening declaration: 'This is the nadir of the story', a complete sentence of simple syntax, purports to give a straightforward proposition, however Murray subtly disrupts any implied certainty. The demonstrative pronoun ('This') does not function as a substitute for something already referred to but refers to what follows in the poem; to *that*. Murray's opening line has therefore introduced the structure of metaphor (*this is that*), ambiguating the apparent straightforwardness. The relationship between the terms of a metaphor invokes simultaneously similarity and difference. It also introduces consideration of perspectival shifts as metaphor

---

<sup>317</sup> Les Murray, *New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), 537.

rearranges the reader's view of both subject and vehicle. The reader-viewer's capacity to see, with the eyes of the mind, imagination, or spirit, is expanded.

That Murray is aware of perspectival associations is indicated by his use of 'nadir'; the etymology of which reveals its Arab origins. The historic Semitic origin of the word intimates the way the past lives on in the present; of the hidden associations of words which do not only straightforwardly speak in any given present but carry over into their articulation layers of the silenced words (and ideas and history) which have shaped them. One such silencing in the church, Murray's poem suggests, concerns Mary's Jewish identity. Originally meaning *opposite*, 'nadir' was adopted by cosmology to mean that point that stands in opposition to the zenith and came from there to mean the lowest point of anything: place, time, or story. All three of those low points are evoked in Murray's poem. The word's poetic resonances include not only locational depression (here, Cross tamped into earth) but of gravity, the cosmic force that attracts all Earth-dwellers towards the surface of the planet. The dead Christ operates symbolically as its own cosmic force, pushing down the upward trajectory of Christ's ministry which now appears to have been only a temporary elevation. Here is language itself brought low, the Word upon which all others depend, lifeless; word and body a synthesis of dead *corpus*.

The introduction of perspectival awareness is a reminder of the gap that can exist between the apparent and the actual. In the context of historic realities, even more so, heavenly ones, this implies a necessary reserve in speaking, as human sight is always limited by its vantage point of place and time. Perspective informs the background narrative field of the poem. According to the synoptic gospel accounts of the Crucifixion, a darkened sky immediately followed it (Mat. 27:45; Mk. 15:33; Lk. 23:44).<sup>318</sup> If this were the result of a solar eclipse, its perceptible extent would

---

<sup>318</sup> As per the gospels, the Crucifixion took place on the Day of Preparation for the Passover memorial, which begins each year on the fourteenth day of the lunar month of Nisan. Two dates towards the end of Christ's life would have met these criteria, the most favoured being 3<sup>rd</sup> April, AD 33. The Markan gospel notes the three hours of darkness at Christ's death, offering no explanation. One family of Lucan papyri appends an explanation of a solar eclipse. As Passover occurs at the time of the full moon, a solar eclipse would not have then been possible. See Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, "Astronomy and the Date of the Crucifixion," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

be dependent upon a viewer's vantage point on Earth. It would only be perceptible within a certain latitude. What appears to be the case – and effectively is so – that the sun is occluded, is itself an optical illusion where the alignment of moon and sun makes the spheres appear to be the same size. Murray's preoccupation with the apparent and the factual is present in 'looks' in line three, a verb that could either carry an unambiguous meaning, (this is how her hair looks), or an idiomatic one, (this is how her hair *seems* to look).

Having declared what follows to be the lowest point, the spatial framing of the first line acts in conjunction with the meaning. The following *line* is missing, blanked out. The reader must negotiate this breach, travelling down the page; the meaning of nadir enacted in the reading process. The regress of the story's movement by way of anti-Semitism, disrupting 'strangeness', and death, unexpectedly turns at the penultimate line with the phrasal verb, 'could have been stoned to death'. That Mary was not stoned to death is inferred from the maternal figure: 'is still alive in her body.' The poem therefore ends by recasting what seemed to be 'nadir' as something else instead; perhaps even zenith, as her son who is 'eucharist' is 'alive' within the body of His believing mother. A further ambivalence of the phrasal verb's use ('could have been') points in a different direction. Murray's probing of the Roman Catholic Church's bar on women bearing priestly office, which seemed to imply his sympathy with reform, is unsettled as the words of a phrasal verb adhere to invariant (*received, traditional*) word order.

Murray's *Pietà* poem was published in a collection, *Poems the Size of Photographs* (2002). Informing his poem appears to be the mid-twentieth century biblical studies project, the so-called 'third search' for the historical Jesus, aimed at seeing Jesus within his Jewish context. Murray extends this quest to His mother. The European medieval head-dress she wears in Tura's painting is called a '*sheitel*,' the head-covering of an orthodox Jewish woman. The word resituates Mary within her Jewish lineage, challenging the effect of ecclesial enculturation of her, including church-commissioned art, which expunged her Jewish identity.<sup>319</sup> Mary of the church

---

<sup>319</sup> Images of an 'Aryan Christ,' disseminated by European missionaries, have contributed, it has been argued, to 'the oppression of the "the other" living inside Europe – the Jews'. Piu-lan Kwok,

was elevated as external downward pressure forced out Mary of Zion. The disarray of her head-dress ('torn away') now reads as an act of anti-Semitic violence. Her exposed hair that 'looks burnt' incriminates European culture, which includes the church, in Jewish persecution which in the early modern period included occupational and residency restrictions, expulsions, scape-goating and burning alive (as in Strasbourg in 1348); a lineage of persecution culminating in the *Shoah*. The relationship Murray establishes between '*sheitel*' and 'cropped hair' reforges her dual identity within Israel and the church, and each to the other, as Christian women religiously cropped and covered their hair. Murray's poetic practice coalesces with Vatican II's reorientation towards the Jews. Formally repudiating the church's part in discriminatory abuses of the past, *Nostra aetate*,<sup>320</sup> states: 'the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed' and that the church 'deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-semitism levelled at any time or from any source against the Jews' (NA, 4).

While Murray's inclusion of Mary's Judaism aligns with the church's favourable perspectival shift towards the Jews, he pushes beyond conformity to the magisterium in the next line, intimating that a further shift may result from reconsidering what the Incarnation implies. He opens up this contentious field by enacting in words just such a surprising imaginative shift in perspective: 'She had said the first Mass.' Deliberately anachronistic, the later formalised rite ('Mass') is returned to the originating person who is Mary. Confecting Christ's body and showing it forth before the assembly is the sacerdotal function of the priest in the Roman Catholic Church. This Eucharistic sacrament is interpreted with a strongly sacrificial character. This sacrifice, though, was made possible by the Incarnation. As Murray has already invoked an historical consciousness in his lines about the head-dress, they carry over to influence consideration of Mary's historic role in God's-becoming-flesh. At the Annunciation, the Blessed Sacrament of the Mass materialised

---

"Engendering Christ," in *The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women*, ed. Elizabeth A. Johnson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 256.

<sup>320</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*: on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)

within Mary's body. Her maternal body can therefore be thought of as sacramental in that it made visible the invisible, and her body has an inherent relationship with what she represents (Mary as *mother* represents the one of whom she is mother). As it was through her body that Christ was given to the world, she confects, carries and bears forth Christ in a unique manner. Mary is therefore the one able to say in a singular, especial and concrete way the Christic and priestly words of institution: 'This is my body, given for you.'

This connection was explored early in the church. One of the early Marian titles was 'Virgin Priest,' the origin of which may lie in poetic expressions used by the early Greek homilists.<sup>321</sup> In calling Mary's conception of Christ 'That first eucharist,' Murray both connects her pregnancy with the primary sacrament of the church and preserves a sense of its difference with the lower-case *e*. In intimating a difference, Murray appears to be simultaneously asserting Mary's priesthood but not unambiguously proposing it as support for calls for reform of church practice. The position of the magisterium is that Mary's priesthood is an instance of the priesthood into which all Christian believers are admitted rather than being ordination into the priestly order of the few from which her sex invalidates her.<sup>322</sup> John Paul II, in response to persistent requests for this sexual exclusivity to be altered, declared unambiguously in his Apostolic Letter of 1994, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, that 'the Church has not in any way the right to confer priestly ordination on

---

<sup>321</sup> Tina Beattie writes of René Laurentin's 1950s doctoral theses that, in his study of historical and theological writings, he found persistent recurrence of the idea of Mary's priesthood in the Patristic period. Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate : A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2002), 198-202.

<sup>322</sup> The liturgical distancing of Mary removes a possible confusion which her presence as priest could give rise to. The priestly words of institution, 'This is my body,' follow the formula of Jesus at supper on the eve of His passion. Jesus' usage would, presumably, have been enigmatic to His original audience. The riddling metaphoric usage invites reflection, more especially after His death, upon what the body of Jesus is, how it is to be understood, and what the relationship is between Jesus' fleshly body and that body as bread. Graham Ward argues convincingly that Jesus' fleshly body is being withdrawn and being transposed; His declaration performing the transposition. (Graham Ward, "The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ," in *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bjorn Krondorfer (London: SCM Press, 2009), 102.) Mary as priest would confuse Jesus' language, and what it means, by introducing a literal element that would distract attention from the words of Christ and divert it to the nature of the relationship between maternal and filial bodies. A mother's body has an ambivalent relation to her child's body, which is both hers and not hers. Mary as mother could properly utter the words of Eucharistic institution, 'this is my body given for you,' to her son. The Eucharistic species ('my body') is, though, that of the son, not the mother. For Mary to speak the words in the liturgy would be to introduce confusion between the body of the mother and the body of the son, and to suggest the two are conflated. It is the Son's body, given through Mary, which effects salvation.

women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the faithful of the Church.<sup>323</sup> Speaking as Supreme Pontiff, John Paul's words are intended to allow no degree of latitude in interpretation, so precluding further expressions of dissent. It is a statement disallowing the disputedness of this as *fact*. Murray's use of the lower-case *e* distances the originating event (figured as the Incarnation, rather than the supper in the upper room recorded in the gospels) from its subsequent formalisation in liturgical practice and theological reflection, where it is given an upper-case *E*. Murray's concerns here seem two-fold: to acknowledge a difference between the two *e*/Eucharists where difference may blur the distinction but not efface it, and to reclaim what should be the unity of church doctrine, liturgical practice, and scripture, where one is not posited over the other.

Murray's interest in language and its relationship with people who use it is indicated in the phrase, 'made Godhead a fact.' The phrase conjures associations of Wittgensteinian philosophical thinking about how language works.<sup>324</sup> If language is not best thought of as being strictly logical and abstract, disconnected from the people who use it, the alternative version becomes one that begins instead with how daily language operates; a version that allows for the 'near-Nixonian trickiness of ordinary language.'<sup>325</sup> Language that tries to denote closely and directly its referent is the language of containment, (as in John Paul's *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*), rather than language that *breaks open* in a way that reconfigures perceived certainties. Murray's phrase also alludes to the Athanasian Creed<sup>326</sup> which speaks of the unity of Christ, God and Man, as existing 'not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood by

---

<sup>323</sup> John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Only, (1994), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jpii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html). Apostolic letter. §4.

<sup>324</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) saw language as logic-based and *picturing* the world. The world language described was one of independent *facts* that only gleaned value from the connections they had with other facts. These connections between facts were not intrinsic to the things themselves. This view of language could not accommodate ethics or aesthetics. See David Foster Wallace, "The Empty Plenum: David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*," in *Both Flesh and Not: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 109. This is Wallace's term to describe the different tack of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

<sup>326</sup> This doctrinal formulation was in use in church liturgy from the sixth century. Its inclusion in the poem therefore draws together doctrine and praxis.

God.’ This elevation of humanity is not a question of its being accounted *as if* it were of God, but is a real theosis. C.S. Lewis sees the Athanasian creedal formula as analogous to his own concept of ‘Transposition’ as accounting for the relation between things natural and things accounted as spiritual.<sup>327</sup> If the transposition of human into divine is only approached ‘from the lower medium,’ error is the result as such a critic will see ‘all the facts but not the meaning.’<sup>328</sup>

Murray’s poem probes the nature of the relationship between the ‘fact’ of Godhead in Christ, which Christianity proclaims, and how that understanding becomes traumatically threatened when Christ is dead: ‘what of that is still true / now, with his limp weight at her knee?’ Murray seems here to be suggesting the fissure Lewis identifies between *fact* and *meaning*.<sup>329</sup> Christ’s death apparently annihilates the meaning that some saw inhering in His person. Facticity *per se* cannot encompass all that is reality nor offer an account of it (meaning). The place of death is just the place where this tension is most poignantly realised: the fact of death undoing what was the fact of life and pressing the possibility of meaning. Death appears to annihilate all facts, even the fact of life. The *fact* of Christ’s death presses the possibility that the *fact* of Christ’s divinity was not fact at all. The *pietà* is the image of this crisis. In the lacuna created by Christ’s death is a faltering of belief in the potentiality of words to express truth, as the foundational Word is apparently permanently and disastrously silenced.

The exactitude of the poem’s title, striving for academic precision, is seen by the poem’s end to have furthered the questions raised in the verse. Certainties of artistic attribution can be over- turned as further evidence becomes available. The title implies the poem’s question: ‘what of that is still true / now...?’ What was once believed to be the case: that Cosme Tura was the artist of a particular painting, is, so the title implies, no longer believed to be so. An artistic canon is always subject to revision. Some *facts* occlude others (the actual painter of the piece; the

---

<sup>327</sup> "Transposition" was first delivered as a sermon in 1944 and first published in the current augmented form in 1962. C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Jones, 170.

priestly mother, Mary). Within Murray's poetic exploration, it therefore remains a possibility that the Roman Catholic Church's position on the relationship of women to the priesthood could be modified. Murray's poem, from its opening presentation of spatial perspective introduced in the term 'nadir,' through its consideration of the relationship between myth and fact within ecclesial history, to the central question about truth and certainty, to the final line concerning the nature of the Eucharist and the body, is a reflection upon how we arrive at a truthful vision; a vision of comprehensive scope that neither distorts, exaggerates, minimises nor omits.

#### **4.3.4 Tric O'Heare, 'Madonna of the Dry Country'<sup>330</sup>**

Tric O'Heare uses the attrition of the figure of the Virgin Mary to explore themes resonant with John Paul's concerns: subjectivity and freedom, relationship to the sacred, giftedness, and loss of communion. Published in her 2003 collection, *Tender Hammers*, 'Madonna of the Dry Country,' looks at the inability of the Mary figure to speak to ecclesial or secular culture owing to the religious climate which generated and sustained the image no longer being dominant or widely understood. Present in the poem as a religious statue of the Immaculate Conception, there are still those for whom she is a recognisable sign which is responded to, ('the faithful'), although for others, ('men'), her significance as a sign has been almost entirely erased. She also suffers from the implied failure of her cultural transference from southern European Roman Catholic culture, registered within the poem's title ('Madonna'), to the desert of inland Australia. She is referred to within the poem only by her Anglicised personal name. Through disrupting the convention of naming, O'Heare is raising the question of personal subjectivity and its possible occlusion through archetypal renaming. By linking the archetypal title with the established informal descriptor, ('Dry Country'), the modifying effects of spatial and cultural migration are raised, along with the possible loss of meaning; re-location possibly resulting in dis-location. The poetic voice indicates the loss of the image's intelligibility in the new continent by use of a doubly incongruous metaphor ('beach ball') for the spheroid on which she stands.

---

<sup>330</sup> Jennifer Harrison and Kate Waterhouse, eds., *Motherlode: Australian Women's Poetry: 1986-2008* (Glebe, NSW: Puncher and Wattmann, 2009), 62-3.



The governing conceit of the poem is that Mary is a conscious subject but this is far from straightforwardly so. The poetic speaker purports to speak on behalf of the personal subject, Mary. Unlike Noel Rowe's poetic voice which speaks as Mary in the first-person, O'Heare's Mary is present as a voice only in a secondary way through the third-person pronouns used of her. O'Heare's poetic voice interposes itself as a mediating third between Mary and the anonymous 'they' of line two, and between Mary and the reader. Her subjectivity is inferred by the reader as she has an inner life of thought and feeling imputed to her – she 'remembers,' 'prays,' 'dreams,' 'knows' – but is unable to make utterance. Her only exteriorization is the tears she sometimes weeps although how the reader is to construe these tears, given the complexity of imputed subjectivity, is unclear: literal tears? Imagined? Miraculous? The responses of the remnant of the faithful to her weeping show a naïf 'simplicity' that bypasses the difficulties of subjectivity, or perhaps, as hinted at with their 'hologrammed' eyes, they mistake real subjectivity for sophisticated counterfeit. Her tears are the last vestige of her residual freedom. This is not the only ambivalence regarding subjectivity in the poem. The *I* who is the poetic voice is not simply a fiction. It does exist but only in and through the poem. It is a metaphor of presence, as is the reader – *you* – who may never materialize.

The only freedom of the personal subject remains her interior life but, as with her imputed subjectivity, this, too, is ambivalent. Restrained within 'a 44-gallon drum,' a travesty of the tabernacle, whose 'galvanised ribs' associate her with the creation of Eve from the rib of the sleeping Adam, Mary retains none of the original associations of the mobility of the curtained tent of the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>331</sup> The tabernacle within Roman Catholic churches is the privileged housing of the pyx containing the consecrated host which was, until Vatican II, routinely placed centrally on the altar in the place of highest honour. Mary now shares with her son the experience of being shut away and de-centred from the church. Her residual association with maternal protection is also upended. While Helen Kraus says of the Hebrew word for *rib* that is

---

<sup>331</sup> Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, vol. 1 (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 266.

has ‘an extensive semantic domain, much of it relating to structural support and associated with the Temple or altars; “rib,” “side,” “corner,” “beam,” even “chamber”,’<sup>332</sup> the metaphoric continuity is disturbed in the poem where the rhythmic expansion of fleshly ribs within a living body is transmuted to rigidly inflexible ribs that effectively sign *rigor mortis*.

O’Heare implies this current mute state of Mary has had a long gestation. The poem opens in the middle of the present action, establishing contemporariness: ‘This time,’ which also locates it within a continuous history of which it is a part. This earlier history is indicated spatially by the introductory white space that constitutes most of the first *line*; the whiteness performing the blanking-out of Mary from her own discourse. O’Heare’s use of the white space is a political gesture that refuses the erasure of particular histories, as those unrecorded histories have contributed to the shaping of the recorded present. It also situates the current abuse this Mary suffers within a hinted-at past although the non-specificity of ‘they’ leaves open the question of culpability while the action of the poem strongly implies ‘they’ are men. As the first words that open the poem their unusual end-placement is a call to accountability: ‘This time’ associates the present action with its historic antecedents and impugns those who continue the negative heritage.

This sense of negative temporality is implicitly linked with the type of statuary O’Heare’s Mary is, and how this is misconstrued. David Jones has argued in his essay, “Art and Sacrament,” that man’s sign-making is an inherently sacred activity that also points to man’s being involved in some way with never-endingness. Signs, Jones says, are constituted by their significance of ‘some “reality”, so of something “good”, so of something that is “sacred”’.<sup>333</sup> This means, he explains, that art is an inherently ‘religious’ activity where the etymology of *religio* is key: that which binds or secures, as in a ligament that supports an organ. What it binds is man to God, a binding which ‘secures a freedom [of man] to function.’<sup>334</sup> It is, on Jones’ account, this distinctive type of sign-making that signifies man’s elevated position within creation, as only

---

<sup>332</sup> Kraus, 24.

<sup>333</sup> Jones, 157.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 158.

humans have the ‘unique title, poeta.’ The sign-making of beasts, by contrast, is entirely functional and ‘transitive,’ and angels, who have volition but no bodies, are unable to ‘make.’<sup>335</sup> Jones explains that his definition of art is not making any comment about the kind of art, or the uses to which it is put, or to the intention of the artist.<sup>336</sup> Jones has a broad understanding of what constitutes *ars* and when illustrating his analysis of it uses a birthday cake as an example. It conforms to his definition as it is a thing made gratuitously as an explicit sign which is shown forth to represent and recall something significant (x’s birthday) with the ‘full intention to make this making thus.’<sup>337</sup> Accordingly, O’Heare’s Mary statue meets Jones’s requirements of art. She is not, though, treated as art, one of the indicators of which is her thwarted involvement with the divine eternal. The numerous time indicators (‘This time,’ ‘One minute,’ ‘the future,’ ‘Every year,’ ‘Often,’ ‘dawn,’ ‘Some days’) anchor her within the created temporal order, offering her no sense of its possible transcendence through a concomitant participation within eternity. She dwells in secular time unmarked by religious observance. Canvassing all time options, she searches for release which she fails to find; time imprisoning her as effectively as her own mantle or the drum in which she stands.

The treatment of O’Heare’s Mary amounts to the undoing of *ars*, an anti-poeisis or negative deconstruction at work. Regressively unmade as she is used as target practice: ‘sheared away breasts, / nose, lips, elbow, the arch of her neck’, her distorted and reduced form makes her ever less recognizable as a re-presentation of any woman, much less one whose particular artistic form had been intended to direct veneration to the Holy Mother. She is no longer shown forth but held in, and soon she will no longer be recognisable as *ars* at all as she is ‘Pared back to a suggestion in the rock’; a punning metaphor of her reduced presence in Peter’s church. This deconstruction activates a double metaphor of silencing prompted by the implicit double entendre: artistic fashioning (*articulation*) of Mary, the one who cannot speak/articulate, is reversed; articulated

---

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 149-50.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 164.

form rendered inarticulate. The bullets unsay the image and make of man the hastener of entropy, unleashing chaos over order in an inversion of creation. Engaged in an anti-*poiesis* that does not order nor make sense, it is no co-incidence that these men do not speak. If art is the binding to God to secure the freedom of man's making, that freedom has been deployed incorrectly to inhibit and bind the woman's body: Mary's tongue 'tethered' and arms webbed. As this form is one endorsed and promulgated by statues installed within Roman Catholic churches and shrines, it is O'Heare's critique of the church which has chosen to represent her in this way. The Roman Catholic Church on this reading becomes a negative binding by men which makes expressive freedom for women impossible. This extends to her 'wayward son,' object of her dreams, who fails to materialise or in any way facilitate her emancipation.

Mary registers an equivocal example of human *poesis* in the eyes of the faithful where she sees 'her ancient son hologrammed.' Here is real organic matter ('their eyes') that appears to be a sign that refers beyond itself. This is, though, mimicry of presence and of self-transcendence. A hologram plays with perspectival shifts making dual images appear when either it or the viewer slightly changes position. The apparently three-dimensional image is a trick of light, recorded photographically. The blended word to describe it, *whole writing* is misleading as the image written is an incomplete two-dimensional representation. Similarly misleading is the apparent mobility of the images which are, in reality, a series of stacked static ones. It has the status of the false image; misleadingly, rather than illuminatingly, similar. Mary's son is not present within these believers. His image rests upon the surface of their eyes. He is just an inert image of a person not really present; a trick of the light. Light's association with comprehension ends the poem where the 'luminous' thoughts of Mary have no way of shining forth as they cannot be articulated with her 'tethered' tongue. It is a reversed Annunciation trope, her comprehending light (*comprehension* here in the sense not of cognitive grasp but of recognition) unable to enlighten others; a word/Word unable to emanate from her. She is trapped in a confinement that will not deliver.

Within her intended devotional context, in church or shrine, the statue constituted part of the shared fabric of a religious community. Community, though, is here undone: men pitted against the archetypal woman; 'the faithful' a disparate remnant; son absent to mother. Part of the communal disruption of the faithful post Vatican II was marked by changes within church furnishings. The Vatican II document on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*,<sup>338</sup> in chapter VII, 'Sacred Art and Furnishings,' had enjoined bishops 'to ensure that works of art [...] which offend true religious sense either by depraved forms or through lack of artistic merit or because of mediocrity or pretence, be kept well away from the house of God and from other sacred places'<sup>339</sup> and that images intended for veneration 'should be restricted in number.'<sup>340</sup> Many pieces of devotional statuary, notably those of the Virgin Mary, were removed from parochial churches.<sup>341</sup> According to Jones, though, the standing of art is not determined by its aesthetic quality or the skill of its making; perfection does not make something a sign.<sup>342</sup> On Jones' account, *Sacrosanctum concilium* and the action following upon it, misunderstood the distinction between *ars* and aesthetics. Real-world disposal of Marian statuary is negatively related to the poetic shooting of her; each act relating to her as artefact rather than as art. That the statue 'once was beautiful' may have indicated some pleasing aesthetic quality; it may also signal her status as art. Rowan Williams, explicating the insights of Jacques Maritain, sees a relationship to transcendence as being the distinguishing quality of beauty which is: 'transparent to what is always present in the real, that is the overflow of presence which generates joy.'<sup>343</sup> Beauty to be perceived, though, needs a sensitive beholder who completes the 'performative circle.'<sup>344</sup> This Mary is not attended to as a gateway to something deeper, so is left in solipsistic recitation of 'her own rosary.'

---

<sup>338</sup> Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html)

<sup>339</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 124.

<sup>340</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 125.

<sup>341</sup> Michael S. Rose, "Church Restoration and the Third Millennium," *Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture* 3, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>342</sup> Jones, 156.

<sup>343</sup> Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*, 14.

<sup>344</sup> Hart, 83.

Beauty triggers her desecration ('because she is there and once was beautiful'), drawing upon the historic associations of abusers who blame their victims and disregard their personhood, effectively corralling them with animals, as is here the case ('tiring of ducks, men shoot at her').

Having lost the means of self-expression and self-determination, Mary is unable to be a gift for another. She is the exhausted image, so marooned and self-referential that 'She tells herself' in a parody of self-creation or self-portrait. O'Heare's presentation of Mary radically rejects the normative social and ecclesial linkage between 'maternal suffering and the ability to speak'<sup>345</sup> as something, perhaps, she sees honoured more in the breach than in the observance, and in any case, making feminine speech contingent upon *sufficient* somatic suffering, which embeds an unethical temptation for some to exploit such a connection. Weeping is the only power she retains to transform others who hurry past but are 'sobered or cured' by the sight of her. Her tears are ambiguous in their realisation and recall the central motif of Les Murray's 'An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow'<sup>346</sup> where passers-by react to the sight of an old man silently weeping in the middle of the day in the centre of Sydney. Murray draws a connection between tears and gift, both of which may be either received, returned, or refused by others, each of whom reads the tears differently. No explanation is given for their shedding. O'Heare is apparently linking her *mater dolorosa* figure with Murray's Christic male figure. Each presents the communicative effect of tears which, while expressing some interior state of the weeper, also interpret those who witness them. Mary's tears also function within the poem as a residual possibility of fertility although the moisture of her tears is unequal to the task of greening the desert land or hydrating the aridity of men's desires. Desert occludes its capacity to sustain human life and demands that those who would live in it garner, preserve and transmit its knowledge across the generations. It is land that cannot be hurried, requiring patience to receive its knowledge, a characteristic it shares with art and poetry. It draws together seemingly incompatible qualities, as does a metaphor. Its dual aspects are present in its use as biblical trope

---

<sup>345</sup> Margaret Bruzelius, "Mother's Pain, Mother's Voice: Gabriela Mistral, Julia Kristeva, and the Mater Dolorosa," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18, no. 2 (1999): 228.

<sup>346</sup> Les Murray, *The Vernacular Republic: Poems 1961-1981* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982), 100-1.

where it signs positive spiritual possibilities of purification and strengthened inner vision (cf. Hosea 2:14 and Mat. 4:1-11), and of curse (cf. Gen. 3:19). Composed of scattered dust, it threatens to reclaim man, undoing him as dust.

O’Heare’s Mary is linked with her imagined son in an unending cycle of violence which figures in her dreams of his ‘torn and bloodied arms.’ Blood both testifies to his victimhood and is the reason for it (‘the future encoded in his blood’). As his blood came from his mother, it is she who is implicated as the cause of his suffering.<sup>347</sup> An image of a reversed *pietà*, her son’s comforting arms are ephemeral, the stuff of her dream, evaporating ‘when dawn comes’ and ‘working dogs / stretch awake.’<sup>348</sup> John Paul II contrasts the respect for another’s subjectivity which characterises receiving another in authentic love, with the body viewed as an object of lust, describing the latter as the body being used as a ‘terrain of appropriation’ (TOB 32:6). It is an apposite image for this poem where Mary is the violated gift (cf. TOB 61:4) and even the desert-scape is appropriated (‘backyard reclaimed from dust’). Her literal breakage betokens not life springing forth, as in symbolic and metaphoric breaking open, but the reduction of the subject as ‘an object within our system of understanding.’<sup>349</sup>

#### 4.4 Overview of *Pietà* poems

The *Pietà* is the Annunciation’s counterpart and poetic completion: *counterpart* because it inversely images absence as the visibility of death where the Annunciation had imaged presence as the invisibility of conception; *completion* because it completes Christ’s handing over of Himself to Mary at the Annunciation, inaugurating the ‘indissoluble link’<sup>350</sup> that connects Mary and her son. If sons, though, have to psychologically and emotionally separate from their mothers in order

---

<sup>347</sup> This is the clichéd account of women who, through bearing life into the world, also deliver lives into death, as this is the inevitable end of each life. Julia Kristeva makes explicit this connection, and personally appropriates it in her own experience of new motherhood. Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 173.

<sup>348</sup> Seemingly a literary allusion: ‘For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me.’ Psalm 22:16.

<sup>349</sup> Ian Paul, “Metaphor and Exegesis,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Moller (Carlisle, CA and Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Publishing and Zondervan, 2001), 391.

<sup>350</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

to form themselves as men,<sup>351</sup> then this image is unsettling, disturbing the purported finality of that developmental theory. It provokes a disequilibrium in the viewer with the overthrowing of the expected order of generational death. Its resonance as an image is perhaps attributable to its fusion of specific immanence (*this* mother, *this* son) and typological transcendence (*any* mother, *any* son).

The *Pietà* supplements the gospel passion narrative by providing a trope of the inter-relatedness of life and death; suffering and love. Elizabeth Sewell cites German-language poet, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) for whom a partnership between love and death was not the contradiction it seemed. It is when death becomes isolated from love that it becomes depersonalized, cheap, and wasted. When unified, death is transformed by love into something rich, personal, and purposeful.<sup>352</sup> Viewed exteriorly from a temporal perspective, Jesus' death would have met Rilke's conditions for a death isolated from love, so futile. The *Pietà* image is a shorthand summary of the meaningfulness of Jesus' death; a renunciation of its futility and a proclamation of its richness. Mary, from a temporal perspective, retrieves this death's meaningful possibilities. The *Pietà* image oscillates between the two modes of death it presents (physical and psychic-emotional) and the two modes of love (filial and maternal). It encapsulates the frozen tensions of grief while transcribing an endless dynamic of chiasmic love-in-sacrifice. It is this classic portrayal of the *Pietà* upon which McAuley draws in his poem.

Suffering is always a particular, according to whichever measure one applies – severity, type, length of time endured, possibility of reprieve. It cannot be deputed to another. This is the assumption upon which McAuley fashions his *Pietà*. The suffering of Mary at the Crucifixion has been seen as a displacement of natal suffering which the tradition has denied her experiencing at her son's birth.<sup>353</sup> The Crucifixion is therefore her alternative labour; her suffering a task which cannot

---

<sup>351</sup> Chodorow (1978), cited in John D. DeLamater and Janet Shibley Hyde, "Essentialism Vs. Social Constructivism in the Study of Human Sexuality," *The Journal of Sex Research* 35, no. 1 (1998): 13.

<sup>352</sup> Elizabeth Sewell, *The Human Metaphor* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 170. ff

<sup>353</sup> Among the early attestations of a pain-free delivery: Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John Damascene, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus. Some interpreters have seen it as prophetically indicated in Isaiah 66:7.



be performed by another on her behalf. It is this non-transferability and particularity that confirms it as a personal event.

The implications of the non-transferability and particularity of suffering is broadened in Murray's poem beyond the individual to the Jewish communal body, represented by Mary. The longitudinal suffering of Mary's people, is an objective reality which has, at times, been historically obfuscated, enabled, or dismissed. Murray's poem looks at the intractability of the perspectival challenge; the limits that bound our seeing. Murray's poem presents the tensions that can pertain between objective reality (fact) and interpretation (perspective). His poem is a reminder that 'there are always more sides to a thing.'<sup>354</sup>

The typological Mary in the *Pietà* image functions not only as mother but as spouse; typology strongly implied in Thomas' poem. Viewing Jesus and Mary as types, Kenneth Howell sees the Christic-Marian bond as restoring the lost male-female unity of the two, (understood as pertaining to all male-female relations, not only spousal).<sup>355</sup> Thomas' poem overtly evokes this restoration but also undermines it by disincarnating his poem. In declining to display the bodies, Thomas is resisting their presentation as 'things,' more concerned with the evocative poetic possibilities of their absence. His handling of the subject retains a sense of the graced nature of the material world, not so much by transferring subjectivity to things (although the Cross is anthropomorphised) as acknowledging materiality's orientation to the common eschatological end of creation.

Tric O'Heare's poem, while not a *Pietà*-type is also concerned with suffering and signage. Her poem looks at hermeneutic and linguistic principles via the treatment of a particular form of Marian sign: a devotional statue. Such pieces are material mediators. In its justification for the continued veneration of such figures and images, the Council of Trent explained that 'the honour

---

<sup>354</sup> Les Murray, "The Trade in Images," in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2011), 347.

<sup>355</sup> Kenneth J. Howell, "Mary's Bodily Participation in the Redemption of Christ: the Johannine Witness," in *The Virgin Mary and the Theology of the Body*, ed. Donald H. Calloway (Stockbridge MA: Marian Press, 2005), 222.

which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent.<sup>356</sup> The Marian figure in O’Heare’s poem is a distressed sign; presence being obliterated by absent understanding. The value of the Marian statue as religious cultural artefact is read against her status as a material object of no monetary value. Once her sign-status is obscured, either deliberately, or through negligence, she gradually reverts to unrealised potentiality (‘dust’). The poem is an encapsulation of the attenuated power of the Marian sign and, by implication, how that redounds to the sign-status of real women.

Effective signs rely upon a shared vocabulary and grammar between sign-maker, sign, and receiver. The poem plays different types of imaginative productions against each other: the Marian devotional object (*art* in Jones’ terms); her imagined interior voice; her poetic presentation. O’Heare presents *Madonna* as an ecclesial abstraction, ironically present as mere materiality. *Body* is the categorical ground that shapes O’Heare’s poem: the hazy background of the implied body ecclesial of the hierarchy; the dispossessed body ecclesial of the remnant lay faithful; the sex-stereotypic body of violent males; the female body gendered according to a schema of absence – of agency, of action, of possibility.

---

<sup>356</sup> Council of Trent, Session XXV, second decree.  
<http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch25.htm>.

## Chapter 5 Towards a new Mariology: a theology of Mary's maternal body

Mary's body has been attenuated in the Catholic imaginary, reduced in visual images to hands, face, and occasionally, until discouraged at the Council of Trent, her breast. To attend to Mary's obstetric body is to look to that which is naturally hidden from view and that which ecclesial officialdom would have strenuously kept hidden. It was this body, though, that grew the body of Christ. In order that the ecclesial body of Christ may grow in understanding by contemplating the poetics of Mary's maternal body, I look now for a way through the impasse of protecting Marian modesty and contemplating her in her bodily totality. To that end, I look below at the several metaphoric terms said to indicate the ways Mary relates to God, and how these may offer a way through.

Western and Eastern-rite churches see Mary's perpetual virginity as a sign of her holiness; her being set apart for God. Her reservation is understood to be the form of her self-giving to God for the furtherance of His will (which is furthering the *Kingdom* of her son). In this sense, virginity and marriage are not contradictory opposites, but signs that converge, pointing to total self-gift of the spouses, each to each (God is deemed to be the *spouse* of consecrated virgins), as has been more fully developed in 3.3.2 above. *Virginity* is a boundary-marker that, once crossed, effects a permanent change in *knowledge*, which is negatively signed in the woman's body (perforated hymen) and in language use (no longer called *virgin*). Virginal spouses upon their marriage give to each other what has never been given before, intending that the inaugurated sexual relationship will continue to be exercised exclusively between them.

One of the chief metaphors for the church is the *bride* of Christ. The Virgin Mary was appointed by the dying Christ to be mother of the church, whose first and chief member she is, by virtue of being the faithful mother of the Son. Mary is therefore not only *virgin* but *bride* and *mother*. A bride is a liminal figure, standing in anticipation at a threshold. Mary, then, is the one who is reserved for God, as signed by her perpetual sexual chastity, consistent with her status as *bride*.

Scripture and tradition, though, also ascribe marital status to Mary. This bride is already spouse, as confirmed by the birth of her son, fruit of that mystical union. Mary, virgin bride, already espoused to the Holy Spirit, has been fecundated by that Spirit.<sup>357</sup> Although she did not experience human sexual relations, her body is nevertheless a *married* body.<sup>358</sup> The moment of her assent at the Annunciation is the moment she is conjoined with God in the unique act of unitive communion that results in her pregnancy. That moment of total self-giving is analogous to the human spousal relation. The communion in which Mary and the Holy Spirit participate is definitively transformative in a way analogous to virginal first married sexual congress. Mary, we may say, has experienced a mystical eroticism, where ‘mystical’ does not bypass the body. The connection between erotic desire and intense yearning for God is a persistent thread present in Christian mysticism and a theme that has been taken up, as already seen, by Sarah Coakley.<sup>359</sup> Mary articulates her confidence in the eschatological transformation to be wrought by the reign of God in her declamation of the Magnificat in Luke’s gospel.

If desire for God is proportionate to holiness, then we can infer that Mary’s desire would have been extraordinarily intense. This is deduced from her calling: to be the mother of God. She would, we must assume, have been given the graces necessary to fulfil her specific calling; an assumption which Luke’s gospel affirms with the angelic salutation (‘Full of grace’). Such an experience of intense longing to give to the other without reservation is analogous to the spousal relation which includes sexual expression. Spousal coitus points to what the completed sex act was intended to be: a sign of the unique nature of the marital relationship, which both expresses and forms the bonds of love. It also is a sign that points beyond itself to the plenitude that awaits the faithful: union with the divine. Sarah Coakley, drawing upon and extending the scholarship of Verna Harrison,

---

<sup>357</sup> Cf. Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud Munus*: On the Holy Spirit, (1897), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_09051897\\_divinum-illud-munus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_09051897_divinum-illud-munus.html). Encyclical. §14.

<sup>358</sup> For discussion of Tertullian’s logic that Christ’s birth caused His mother to change from virgin to wife, see Otten Willemien, “Christ’s Birth of a Virgin Who Became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian’s *De Carne Christi*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 3 (1997).

<sup>359</sup> Some of these sources are: Solomon’s Song of Songs, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Bernard of Clairvaux, St John of the Cross. Coakley, 344.

finds this connection well-developed in Gregory of Nyssa. Coakley speaks of the ‘eschatologically-oriented’ feature of Gregory’s theory whereby the faithful who progress in holiness are progressively transformed; *eros* purified and redirected to God, in whom it ‘finds its truer meaning.’<sup>360</sup> Mary, it is permissible to say, has experienced such an eschatological quality of sublimed sexual union at the Annunciation. Therefore, although Mary is ever-virgin, it is not inappropriate to contemplate her obstetric body which is, for us, the holy sign of both her reservation to, and her communion with, God. It is possible to make a stronger claim than this: that to reclaim the poetics of Mary’s full body is desirable if one wants to resist a religious cultural bifurcation in attitude to her which (properly) valorises her exceptional holiness while regrettably minimising and circumscribing her body which manifest that holiness. Mary gave her all to God, including her obstetric materiality, returning to Him matter He had created, so that He could reside within it by first entering into her.

## 5.1 Flowing (blood)

### 5.1.1 *Sacrifice*

Blood is a major biblical motif. Included in the proto-historic narrative of the post-diluvian world is God’s renewal of His blessing upon humanity and His expansion of permissible food sources to include every non-human moving thing. This expansion is modified by a divine proscription against the eating of animal or avian blood as blood is ‘its life’ (Gen. 9:4). The proscription, to be honoured by mankind, functions so as to reserve life to God. The later Levitical laws explicate the role of blood within the liturgical life of the Israelites where it is to be reserved as an offering of atonement (Lev. 17:11). The priestly sacrificial system of Israel is to be ordered around blood-letting. The bloodshed of women during menses and *post partum* needed to be accounted for within this system of sacrificial blood atonement in such a way so as not to challenge or confuse the meaning of the cultic offering.

---

<sup>360</sup> "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1 (2000): 67, 69. Sexual distinction, male and female, is, in Gregory’s theory, something which serves a heuristic purpose but which is ultimately outgrown.

Levitical laws proscribed the presence of menstruating women anywhere within sacred space. Within the Second Temple, this included even the outer Court of the Gentiles.<sup>361</sup> The particular circumstances of the issuance determined the period of her exclusion. Regular menses precluded her for up to fourteen days; *post partum* lochia invalidated her for forty days if she gave birth to a son, eighty days if to a daughter. Newborn sons were circumcised on the eighth day of life when they were deemed to be ‘ritually neutral,’ before which time they were ritually unclean owing to their proximity to the maternal blood loss during birth.<sup>362</sup> The presence of bleeding women within sacred architectural space was apparently deemed defilement. The logic of argument and symbolisation is not structured as a simple dialectic, though.

Joan Branham points out that the antipathy between female reproductive blood and liturgical sacrificial blood seems to have arisen less from their polar opposition (profane versus sacred) and more from their kinship in purifying and bestowing life. The twelfth chapter of the book of Leviticus lists the exclusions pertaining to parturient women; verse two deeming her to be ‘ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation’ if she gave birth to a son. The next thirty-three days are described in verse four as ‘Her time of blood purification.’ The time periods are doubled for a daughter. Branham attributes this extension to the mother’s having ‘redoubled life-bearing potential.’<sup>363</sup> Following her prescribed time of purification, the mother is to have a burnt offering and a sin offering made by the priest, after which ‘she shall be clean from her flow of blood’ (Lev. 12:7). This requirement appears to posit the dialectic that Branham disavows, as the animal blood within the cultus cleanses the parturient from exposure to her own blood flow. This seemingly-clear interpretation is, however, not sustainable.

Branham notes that the same root in the Hebrew word for *purify* pertains to both reproductive and sacrificial blood. Animal blood from sin offerings is sprinkled by the High

---

<sup>361</sup> Joan R. Branham, "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces: Menses and the Eucharist in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (2002): 16. This is on the evidence of Josephus.

<sup>362</sup> Leonard B. Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>363</sup> Branham, 17.

Priest at Yom Kippur over the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies and upon the horns of the altar to 'purify it' (Lev.16:14-19). This latter is intriguing, as sacrificial blood on one especially designated day is deemed to be supra-cleansing, even of previously shed, purifying cultic blood. Janet Martin Soskice upholds the view that the Israelite purity laws governing female blood loss had 'nothing to do with sinfulness and a great deal to do with holiness – the holiness of birth and blood and life.'<sup>364</sup> Margaret Barker also notes that 'in temple symbolism, blood was life,' citing the explicit connection made in Leviticus 17:11 between blood, life, and atonement.<sup>365</sup> The life that is rightly God's cannot be seen to have a symbolic rival in the blood of the bleeding woman. Superficially, the woman's blood would seem superior to that of the animal or avian sacrificial victim, as humans are the pinnacle of creation. Furthermore, her blood is shed for the purpose, potential or actual, of life-giving, rather than life-taking. A closer consideration of the distinctions between the bloods sheds light upon why they each give such different readings.

The ritual blood being animal or avian distinguished and distanced the ancient cult of Israel from alien cults that demanded human sacrifice. Its purpose was to reinstate right relations with God where the determinant of the whole sacrificial system - what constitutes an acceptable offering, including how, when and where it is to be offered - is understood to be God Himself via Mosaic mediation. As blood is a substance reserved to God, the sacrificial spilling of it inscribes a structure of God claiming what is His own: life-blood returning to life-source via the communal actions of the sacrificial priesthood. The blood of the sacrifice is only secondarily animal or avian; primarily, it is God's. The Israelite sacrifices were premised upon a *top-down* initiation, having been commanded by God, in order to activate a *top-down* blessing, from God to His people. This structure removes any arbitrariness concerning sacrifice. It is not a structure of at best, parallel lines, one of ascent and hopefully, one of descending blessing, but that of a circle or parabola, where the offering of the people via their priests is caught up in a tripartite

---

<sup>364</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, "Blood and Defilement," in *Feminism and Theology*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice and Lipton. Diana (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 340.

<sup>365</sup> Margaret Barker, "Atonement: The Rite of Healing," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49, no. 1 (1996): 5.

movement of descent-ascent-descent, beginning and ending with God. Just as the sacrificial blood was primarily God's, so is the sacrifice *the people's* only in a secondary sense. The various sacrifices were a form of reparation or free-will offering to God which God Himself had ordained. Performing the sacrifices according to the divine prescriptions was an act of obedience, trusted to result in divine blessing.

Womanly reproductive blood loss, by contrast, is non-volitional. This crucial distinction carries over into the early Christian church where actual and symbolic discontinuity is seen in the contemporary account of the martyrdoms of the Christian women, Perpetua and Felicitas, the latter of whom was martyred following the birth of her daughter. A careful distinction is made between the bloods of childbirth and martyrdom; the latter deemed superior and purifying because volitional.<sup>366</sup> The blood of fertility is kept symbolically separate from the blood of purification. This is the key to understanding the gendered reading of the blood of martyrdom. Perpetua's father appeals to her to abandon the faith, and so avoid martyrdom, and hence prove herself a good daughter. He and she agree that martyr's blood is masculine by virtue of being voluntarily shed;<sup>367</sup> a characteristic also seen in Tertullian. Distinctions between the bloods of male and female are present in the Levitical laws. Burnt offerings, the most common type, had to be of a male animal (Lev. 1:3,10), whereas offerings of 'well-being' could be either male or female (Lev. 3:1,6). The picture is further complicated in that sin offerings for unintentional breaches were to be male if offered for a 'ruler' (Lev. 4:22-23); female if offered for 'anyone of the ordinary people' (Lev. 4:27-28). For all who had trespassed against the law, once made aware of the offence, an offering of a female animal was to be made (Lev. 5:6).

What this breakdown makes clear is that the purported scheme of animal or sacrificial blood versus female reproductive blood misses the typological sex distinctions within the sacrificial blood system. Sex distinctions according to this system are acknowledged and observation of their differentiation mandated, suggesting a sex-specific difference in meaning of

---

<sup>366</sup> Blake Leyerle, "Blood Is Seed," *The Journal of Religion* 81, no. 1 (2001): 36-7.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-4.



a sacrificial death. The crucial macro separations appear to have been between animal versus human blood-loss, controlled versus uncontrolled bloodletting, and sacrificial versus fertile blood-flow. The principle of unity of the Israelites of the Temple is the shedding of blood in the mandated fashion. The chief symbolic focus seems to be upon *God's* blood being what establishes and maintains filiation. For this reason, the naturally occurring bloodline through the fertile woman needs to be kept remote, lest there be any 'symbolic confusion.'<sup>368</sup>

### **5.1.2 Sustenance**

Within this paradigm, it is easy to see how the Virgin Mary would have posed a sensitive problem. Female menstruants and parturients were forbidden anywhere within the temple precinct and required a time of purification before re-admittance to the sacred space, yet Mary at the Annunciation had the sacred presence within her very body, anchored within her bloody endometrium. The symbolic problem becomes this: if Mary's body is figured as a living Temple with God's holy presence within, then the Levitical laws appear to have been scandalously contravened. Unease with this conundrum is present within early Christian non-canonical literature as Joan Branham notes. She cites the *Protevangelium of James* which narrated Mary's childhood spent within the temple precinct and the priestly decision to remove her, aged twelve, the approximate age of the onset of menses, by betrothing her to Joseph.<sup>369</sup>

The gospels give few details about Mary. The age at which she conceived is not mentioned but has traditionally been thought to have been when she was a young woman. Speculation about her physical condition entails considerations of the Levitical laws and her scripturally-attested-to virginity. If she had already reached menarche, her body would have been through a cycle of ritual uncleanness which seems to compromise its fittingness as a *temple* of God's presence and to preclude an extensive notion of virginity, that is, of its signing the untouched,

---

<sup>368</sup> Tina Beattie, *Woman* (London: Continuum, 2003), 119. Beattie acknowledges this as a problem with a woman as a sacrificial priest. She sees the woman's involuntary blood-loss as introducing 'chaos.' Such disorder, she sees as being linked to cultural ideas of impurity founded on things being 'out of place.'

<sup>369</sup> Branham, 18.

full integrity of the body. Virginity as a state of ‘sexual restraint’<sup>370</sup> is, though, consistent with the thrust of the Levitical laws governing sexual behaviour (Lev. 18). It is also sacrificial when chosen as a way of life. Mary as a young virgin would be able to figure as a pure and living sacred space, where her blood is rendered acceptable through the proleptically effective blood of the personified paschal lamb she carries.

This metaphor can be further developed so that Mary is the necessary vehicle (in a strictly non-utilitarian way) for the sustaining blood of Christ. As blood is liquid tissue, it relies upon a symbiotic relationship with containment in order to function as sustenance for the body. This metaphor of beneficent enclosure when applied to Mary’s relationship with the blood of Christ is satisfying in several ways. It supports the physical property of blood’s fluidity which is always contained within vessels that facilitate its movement (‘mission’) around the body; it expresses that ‘indissoluble link’ (cf. 3.5, above) between Mary and her son (‘mutuality’ and ‘relationality’); and it preserves the distinction between them. This latter is consistent with the retention of differentiation between male and female blood operative in the ancient cult.

The deeper distinction is between Mary as wholly creature and Jesus as human and divine. As with bestial blood and human blood which superficially resemble each other, the bloods are crucially distinctive. Mary as the vessel of the sacred blood has obvious applicability as regards her Eucharistic role: she is the mother of the Eucharistic body; the same body in different modality as the fleshly body she gestated and brought to birth. She it is who contains and presents to the faithful the sacred blood within the body of her son. Thought of metaphorically, Mary is the Eucharistic chalice. This notion of Marian containment is unique in its mode (she is the one mother of the one son; the one chalice of the one Holy Eucharist). This uniqueness, though, also contains sorority. Each of the faithful is called to become a vessel of Christ and through faithfully being one s/he is progressively transformed into that which s/he contains.

---

<sup>370</sup> Leyerle, 40. Leyerle notes that Tertullian and Rabbi Matia see blood as a figure for righteous deeds, particularly those involving restraint.

### 5.1.3 *Cleansing*

While blood is known to transport waste products to elimination destinations within the body, talk of its *cleansing* quality, particularly when applied to Jesus' blood, appears strongly counter-intuitive. Blood is that which stains, is highly visible and difficult to expunge. It shares an important metaphoric quality with language: neither blood spilt nor words spoken can be retracted. They are spent only the once.

The symbolic ambivalence of blood, traceable in the scriptural textual handling of it, has been observed in recent liturgical practice. Andrew Casad had noted a puzzling anomaly: the reluctance of participants at Mass to communicate through the Precious Blood; a number Casad had observed on one occasion to be fewer than one fifth.<sup>371</sup> This observation led him to examine the symbolic connection between blood, sex, and the Eucharist.

Casad drew upon Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978) the main thesis of which is that blood had functioned symbolically for the aristocracy as 'the locus of authority and legitimacy,'<sup>372</sup> but that such symbolic associations had been displaced by sex as the bourgeoisie's chief symbolic discourse. For the ruling class, legitimacy was traced in blood-lines and socio-political authority measured in one's ability to spill blood (in executions and wars), or refrain from so doing, as for example, in the granting of reprieves and stays of execution. The symbolism of blood as connected with socio-political power, signed by the violent spilling of blood, allegedly lost its symbolic power once it was replaced by the power dynamic associated with sex, interpreted broadly as life in all its aspects, signed in healthy bodies, individual and social.<sup>373</sup> Casad argues that the same secular factors which effected a change in blood's signification affected the ecclesial symbolics of Christ's blood, causing the majority of contemporary communicants to eschew its reception.

---

<sup>371</sup> Andrew Casad, "Blood, Sex, and the Eucharist: A Discourse Analysis on the Reception of the Precious Blood," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 313.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 317. Here, citing Foucault.

Foucault had argued in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) that changes in penal regimens away from corporal punishments that inflicted pain or took life, towards those which sought to discipline the mind of the offender, had paralleled the move away from blood as the dominant social symbolic. Just as the new penal codes sought to change criminal behaviours so that they conformed to social behavioural norms, so in an analogous way did attitudes towards, and practices of, sexuality change. As with regimes of discipline and punishment, so with sexuality, which became the new object of knowledge; the new body-discipline moving punishment away from the public sphere into the private.

Casad finds Foucault's thesis convincing as a meta-account of the reason for minimal uptake of the Eucharistic blood. While it may convince as far as it links the gradual removal of public blood-shedding from Western European countries with a concomitant diminution of blood's symbolic power, it leaves open whether, or to what extent, blood-shed still features as a mechanism of political control. That the new regimen advanced by Foucault seeks to govern its citizens' lives through encouraging their observance of body-discipline, suggests its power may have been driven down, but not out.

Blood has not, I would argue, lost its symbolic valence so much as had it sublimated. While blood is no longer used as a tool of control in the West by legitimate socio-political authorities, it remains present in a sublimated way in state concern for, and promotion of, contracepted ('safe') sex and associated abortion practices. This new scheme builds upon the transfer of blood-shed from public visibility to restricted privacy. One-time preoccupation with aristocratic blood-lineage had involved a sublimation of *sex* for *blood* as the *right* sex would secure for one's family lineage the right ('clean') blood. Foucault's proposition of sexuality replacing blood-lines as the new object of power may have, as Casad thinks, broad merit but there has not been a clear-cut substitution of the one for the other.

If, on this reading, sex is sublimated within *blood*, then the Eucharistic blood may well occasion a symbolic crisis, owing to its very visibility. If blood is driven down but not out, then the public Eucharist threatens blood's sublimated secular symbolic power. Not blood-object in the

chalice, but personal blood, it acutely confronts the body politics of power, interrogating by its presence which blood the state currently legitimates (declares *clean*), and what are its methods of enforcement.

## 5.2 Opening (vagina)

In the homily he delivered at his inaugural Mass in 1978,<sup>374</sup> John Paul II expressed a desire for the church and the wider world to open itself to the workings of God. All were exhorted to ‘open wide the doors for Christ’ (n5), and to ‘open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development’ (n5). John Paul was setting the tone for his new papacy, invoking a spiritual and cultural freedom, and a confidence in gospel proclamation, that quashes psychic fearfulness. His words performed his own recommendation, confidently challenging any closure towards God. His mention of political systems being among those needing openness carried especial weight for European communism.

John Paul’s homily expressed his intention that his papacy be characterized by openness. Openness to God, this *yes*, is the quintessential quality of the Virgin Mary. *Opening* used metaphorically is a basal metaphor, with strong somatic association. It is a function of many body parts, rehearsed in the myriad openings of eyes, valsal valves, and lung inflations. Opening is also the chief function and purpose of the vagina. As Mary is deemed to be perpetual virgin, so perpetually sexually inactive, her internal genital tract is associated in a sublimated imaginary with closure. The vagina, though, is an organ not only used for sexual purposes. As well as being the receptive site in sexual intercourse and providing the channel for delivery of a baby, it is also the canal through which menstrual blood leaves the body.

The vagina’s histological structures mark it as remarkably extensible, able to accommodate the changes wrought by penile introitus and the more extensive strains of childbirth. Its fibromuscular layer is arranged as two layers, an inner circular layer and an outer longitudinal

---

<sup>374</sup> John Paul II, “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of His Pontificate,” (1978), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19781022\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html) .

layer. The adventitia layer is collagen-rich and elastic, giving additional strength during childbirth and binding the vagina to surrounding structures. The vaginal walls, posterior and anterior, sit in apposition, touching each other. The vaginal walls are usually *closed* together.<sup>375</sup> So, although the vagina is commonly associated with opening, in its basal state it signs *potentiality*.

### ***5.2.1 Open in the liturgy***

*Openness* and its associations with clarity, accessibility, and forthrightness, is the predicate of biblical personal transformation. The Annunciation is the paradigmatic invitation to open self to God. Mary's act of opening in her *fiat* is honoured by God with the bestowal of His presence in His body. The structure of this exchange lies at the heart of the church's liturgy, most clearly so in the liturgy of the Eucharist.

In the liturgical assembly of the Roman Catholic rite, congregants make a penitential act during the introductory rites, immediately after the entrance of the celebrant and his greeting. This general confession at the beginning of worship is oriented to restoring right relationship, as far as may then be possible, by having the community and its members offer themselves to divine scrutiny. Articulating sins in confession is ordered towards opening up the closure of shame and re-opening the divine-creaturely channel of communication which sin had obstructed. This act initiates a return of relational harmony as originally had been existent between man and God. That original relational harmony was the outcome of a state of mutual openness. The state of trusting openness is one more frequently associated with children than adults. The paradox of the gospel message is that such a state is to be retrieved by the mature Christian (cf. Mat.18:3). The belief of the Roman Catholic Church is that such retrieval of child-like openness can be effected over time by regular, mindful participation in ecclesial liturgy.

In the Anglican Church's introductory rite, the request to be opened is expressed metaphorically, identifying both concrete body-parts (ears and lips) and abstract items (hearts and

---

<sup>375</sup> Helen E. O'Connell, Norm Eizenberg, Marzia Rahman, and Joan Cleeve, "The Anatomy of the Distal Vagina: Towards Unity," *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 5, no. 8 (2008): 1883–91. doi:10.1111/J.1743-6109.2008.00875.X.

minds). The liturgical invocation draws its warrant from the Pauline epistles in which Paul suggests, in his ‘body of Christ’ metaphor, that the nearest analogue for *church* is *body* (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:14-16). A large part of the strength and appeal of the metaphor is its universal applicability; every person being embodied. The liturgical itemisation of body parts assumes their inter-connectedness, together serving the good of the whole person, which is to hear, praise, receive, and contemplate God. The invocation to God to open parts of the body is a request making identifiable and concrete the desire to receive grace. Each body part is to become a conduit of grace and in that process, to help the person realise what she is intended to be. Opening in faith is not only an interior, spiritual affair, but a matter of the whole body.

The liturgical invocation uses metaphor in an upwardly sliding scale. The metonyms of openness: lips, ears, hearts, and minds, function with different levels of metaphoric strength. Lips that physically open evoke both the literal and the metaphoric; ears that do not open and close except metaphorically, in relation to listening or not, rely only on metaphoric usage, so *metaphor* in a stronger sense. The metaphoric reference to ‘hearts’ uses that organ as a metonym of inner-most desire, so of the person, the one who desires. Talk of the mind’s opening uses a submerged metaphor where an abstract thing (‘mind’) is understood via a spatial analogy evoked by the implied invocation of body-parts capable of physical opening.

As each opening of a body-part is only possible by virtue of their living inter-connectedness, one organ’s action is properly regarded as being an action of the body. Each member acts in concert.<sup>376</sup> This is not the objectified body, neither is it the biological body known only reductively through investigative analysis. It is the body in its full integrity, electively working in unison with God-in-Christ. It is the ecclesial body functioning in Marian mode.

---

<sup>376</sup> A lengthy prayer for the service on the second day of Rosh Hashanah is structured around the human body which is explicitly seen as corresponding to particular aspects of revelation, so for example: ‘five men are called to the law, according to the five joints in their knees.’ Service for the New Year, trans. Simon Glazer (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1935), 323-4. Cited in Levin, 194-5.

### 5.2.2 *Open to the Father: Annunciation*

The Lucan Annunciation scene has Mary addressed by the angelic messenger who delivers a word that is both invitation and summons. The suggestion made here is that the Annunciation can be fruitfully contemplated according to the category of *opening*. The Lucan narrative implies a back-story; that Mary heard on this occasion owing to her habitual listening-out-for, or attunement to, God. Listening is an act of attentiveness to other, an inclining-toward. One who listens and hears is one who is neither closed in on self, nor closed off from other. It is an act of openness.

The openness of Mary's ear was a theme developed in Syriac poetry of the early church and later disseminated through the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux.<sup>377</sup> Mary's open ear canal became a convenient site of transposition for visual artists in their portrayals of the event. The conception of Christ could be visually signed via the receptive ear of Mary, thus conveniently bypassing all obstetric sites, so allowing a visual modesty of presentation and distancing the event from any unseemly connotations of sexuality. While it was of the utmost theological importance that the Annunciation be shown to effect an entirely unique form of conception which did not involve sexual relations, and the aural image answered this need with its discreet decorum, it does not expunge all erotic associations. The body is still present, still desirous of union with the beloved. The Word still penetrates a body orifice, and it is this invited entry into the body-person of Mary that effects the transformation of her person from only signing virginity to now co-signing maternity.

Continuing this reading of sublimated sexuality, we can say that Mary's *fiat* speaks her entire person. The Annunciation is the event of her radical letting-go of self. It is her act of total entrustment of herself to the Other who loves her. The God who sought, and she who was found, give themselves to each other. Owing to this structure of unreserved and mutual self-giving, it is easy to understand the metaphorical attribution of the nearest human relational equivalent: Mary as bride to the divine bridegroom. This aspect is present in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's 1977 explication of the

---

<sup>377</sup> Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 342.



dogma of the *Immaculata*: ‘it signifies that Mary reserves no area of being, life, and will for herself as a private possession: instead, precisely in the total dispossession of self, in giving herself to God, she comes to the true possession of self.’<sup>378</sup> As the Annunciation event reaches towards metaphors of spousal love, so the event of spousal love points towards the Annunciation. It is the fullness of Marian giving, without reserve, that allows her sexed, obstetric body, to be suitable as a metaphoric lens through which to view her.

Mary at the Annunciation agrees to become the mother of the incarnated Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, so instantiating in her person a motherhood that is both human and divine. It is by virtue of being the *Theotokos* that Mary has a special relationship with the Father, neatly expressed by Paul Haffner as: ‘the divine and human generations terminate in the one and the same Person of Christ. It is the one Person who is related as Son to God the Father and to the Virgin Mary.’<sup>379</sup>

Mary’s word of assent gives form to her willing and receptive heart and mind. This willing receptivity marks the Annunciation as the paradigmatic way to live: attentively focused on the *telos* to which man’s life is directed. Mary openly pledges herself and it is this ‘trustful-risk’ which ‘perfectly corresponds to the divine-filial pattern of Jesus’ life.’<sup>380</sup> The consequence of her *yes* will become publicly visible in the literal reshaping of her pregnant body. That carnal refiguring is her body forming itself to express what Mary already was: the habitation of God. In her maternal hosting of the god-child, Mary acts as the disciple who ‘willingly prepares a body for the Lord.’<sup>381</sup> The Marian pattern of *fiat* and self-surrender enacts the Marian nature of prayer: at once maternal and spousal.

To speak of Mary’s ‘trustful-risk’ is not to imply any possibility of her trust’s being abused. It refers to the elevated risk of pain and suffering in direct proportion to the scale of one’s loving. This is made explicit early in Luke’s gospel narrative. At the presentation of the infant Jesus

---

<sup>378</sup> Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, 70.

<sup>379</sup> Paul Haffner, *The Mystery of Mary* (Leominster, Chicago: Gracewing Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), 127.

<sup>380</sup> Riches, 187.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Erratum: Riches' citation, Heb. 2:5-7, should read Heb. 10:5-7.

in the temple, Simeon foretells a piercing of Mary's heart (Lk. 2:35). There is no subsequent reference to this in the book of Luke. Christian tradition, though, draws an inter-textual link with the Fourth Gospel account of Mary's witnessing of her son's Crucifixion (John 19:25-27). The inter-textual reading is founded upon the Simeon prophecy having linked future opposition to the adult Jesus with 'a sword' piercing Mary's soul, too. This Marian piercing is commonly interpreted metaphorically to signify her affective empathy with her dying son. This metaphoric interpretation is consistent with another biblical usage where, in the Song of Solomon, the bride's heart is wounded with the arrow of love.<sup>382</sup> Both biblical metaphors as applied to Mary are consistent with John Paul II's talk of the costliness and beauty of self-donation.

The heart piercing of Mary attests to the negative dimension of openness. While it is usually read as a metonym for her personal suffering, associated with grief, current knowledge of heart function cautions against assuming an exclusively metaphoric reading. The indicators are, from studies of heartbeat dynamics, that the heart can be literally adversely affected by emotional tension.<sup>383</sup> As an expressive figure, the heart piercing reads as a transposition of the body piercings, or sharp pains, that would have been expected to have accompanied a usual experience of conception and childbirth: those of the pierced hymen at first sexual congress, and of the vagina and perineum in childbirth. While early Christian tradition tended to disallow the possibility of Marian pain in childbirth on theological grounds,<sup>384</sup> (Mary as type of the new Eve was preserved from original sin, and so from its adverse consequences), the retention of Marian *piercing* in the gospel retains the linkage of love and suffering.

---

<sup>382</sup> David Bentley Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*," in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 123.

<sup>383</sup> Gaetano Valenza, Luca Citi, and et al., "Revealing Real-Time Emotional Responses: A Personalized Assessment Based on Heartbeat Dynamics," *Scientific Reports* 4 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep04998>.

<sup>384</sup> Karl Rahner nuances talk of the assumed painlessness of Jesus' birth for His mother by urging 'prudence' concerning claims as to exactly what this would have involved. While the whole person of Mary is 'essentially different, through the miracle of grace,' including her experience of bringing Jesus to birth, one must also acknowledge that it took place within an infralapsarian world and so 'it works in and through the law of suffering and pain.' Karl Rahner, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 4, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 160.

The paradigmatic gospel image of this connection between love and suffering is that of Mary at the foot of the Cross, as recorded in the Fourth Gospel passion narrative. The spousal typology is retained at the Cross, complicating the more obvious presence of maternal typology. Read according to either typology, Marian pain is the consequence and indicator of the depth of her love. Paul Evdokimov points to the Eastern Church's marriage rite in which bride and groom are crowned with martyrs' crowns; its own liturgical imaging of love (read: *life*) born under the sign of death. Evdokimov cites Leon Bloy's metaphor of suffering as that which creates 'spaces of the heart'; a strongly gestational allusion.<sup>385</sup> Mary, it could be said, is experiencing the pain of cleavage as she and her son are divested of their earthly ties.<sup>386</sup>

The cross-reading of the gospel accounts of Lucan prophecy and Johannine presence, are permissibly conflated into a single reading which renders a cohesive theological poetic. Just as the event of the Cross does not effect a spiritualized salvation but effects it in and through the flesh, so is Mary's response in her body. The Cross is the event that truly penetrates matter. Mary's response, understood as taking place beneath the Cross, attests to the effectiveness of the ingressive Cross *piercing* the natural order. Her alignment in love with the God who saves and the world that needs saving, and her consent to participation in that salvation, sees her suffering the wound that that love inflicts.

To speak of the poetics of the Cross is to speak of its artistry. This is not intended to detract from its solemnity and gravity, but to see it in a different register. George Steiner, in *Real Presences*, (in-text page citations follow), asserts the moral importance of art as a way to encounter the strangeness of the other in such a way that seeks neither to domesticate nor amplify that strangeness. Art-works proceed from an artist's critical engagement with the world, purposed towards

---

<sup>385</sup> Paul Evdokimov, "From the Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition," in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Jr. Rogers, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 189.

<sup>386</sup> Beverly Gaventa proposes reading the giving of His mother to the Beloved Disciple by Jesus at the Crucifixion as His divestment of all earthly attachments. Having been divested of all clothing, He then divests Himself of family and friends. Her reading becomes divestment of the earthly in order to ascend into the heavenly. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary : Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, Personalities of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 91.

continuing that conversation with others. Art, in Steiner's understanding, is inherently social. *Otherness* is engaged with in the piece itself, and with those others who respond to it. This ex-centric orientation of art implies an ultimate other who does not surrender otherness; the ground and the guarantor of otherness. Steiner's metaphysic understands this transcendent other to nonetheless be discernible to the artistic sensibility; to sound through or speak through what is immediately apparent. The aesthetic experience is, says Steiner, 'the making formal of epiphany' (p.226). This epiphanic encounter confronts us with our need to be changed; to live a better way, and the 'shorthand image' (p.143) of this aesthetic encounter is, he says, the Annunciation. It is no accident that Steiner would choose a biblical motif as his illustration of what the arts do: their ingressive quality, their ability to change the lives they enter, and illuminate 'the continuum' (p.227) between the temporal and the eternal, and between the material and the spiritual.

Artistic renditions of Marian openness are most clearly observed in one type of devotional statuary, the *Vierge ouvvrante*.<sup>387</sup> These small figures have hinged torsos that swing wide open to reveal her own child within and often companion figures who have sought her as refuge. The equivalent genre in Western medieval painting was the *Mater misericordiae*, where huddled figures, seeking her protection, crowd beneath her spread mantle. This genre, read according to the poetic proposed here of the obstetric body, would find its equivalent protective valence in the cervix that *spreads* during first-stage labour, or the extensive vaginal reach during second-stage labour. It has already been noted above how the conception of Jesus has been visually cued as sound ('Word') entering the Virgin's ear. While this makes intelligible imaginative sense, the artistic tact in handling Mary is in direct contrast with the artistic handling of her son. Margaret Miles, building on the work of Mitchell Merback, has made a study of the demise of depictions of the breast in Christian religious art which paralleled the increasingly graphic portrayals of violence in Renaissance Crucifixion paintings.<sup>388</sup>

---

<sup>387</sup> Cf. Rubin, 345, plate 20. Mary is presented as the 'sacramental vessel.'

<sup>388</sup> Margaret R. Miles, "God's Love, Mother's Milk: An Image of Salvation," *Christian Century* 125, no. 2 (2008): 23.

The body piercing of the Virgin finds an unexpected contemporary echo in the practice of body-piercing currently popular in Western secular culture. This has been variously understood as colluding in 'our culture's relentless, evaluative gaze'<sup>389</sup> on the body (Joan Brumberg) and as a reflection on the failure of the church 'to provide experiences that are deeply meaningful and so deeply marking'<sup>390</sup> (Tom Beaudoin). These decorative piercings do not aspire to the type of piercing experienced by Mary (openness to God) but they do function as visible and provocative artistic endeavours where the flesh constitutes one half of the artistic materials. The role of the flesh in the partnership is negative: it suffers its own integrity to be intentionally breached. Perhaps such an identity-marker amounts to a cultural *cri de coeur*.

The openness of Mary and Jesus to each other is marked by each one's deeply-marking piercings at the Cross. The metaphor of piercing reflects their metaphysical intertwining such that both are 'made indivisible by the Christ event.' The Cross is thereby signed as the radical opener; that which punctures separate personal boundaries.<sup>391</sup> This opens up another way to interpret Mary's experience of piercing. As with her son, her body boundary is extended to the other in love, potentially without limit. This openness to others is the direct correlate of her openness to God as expressed in that miniature, condensed poem-within-a-poem that was her *fiat*. Her *yes* is confirmed and honoured by God's ongoing *yes* to her at the Cross where the Son opens up her motherhood to the beloved disciple who is present as particular follower and representative of all others.

### ***5.2.3 Open to the Son: Crucifixion***

According to the Fourth Gospel passion narrative, Jesus is already dead when His body is pierced by a lance (John 19:34). This cutting as an historical action served a practical end of confirming or hastening death. Within the gospel narrative it functions both as historical record

---

<sup>389</sup> Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*, The Practices of Faith Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 63.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>391</sup> Nijay K. Gupta, "Which Body Is a Temple (1 Cor.6:19)? Paul Beyond the Individual/Communal Divide," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2010): 533-4.

and also serves metaphoric purposes. Metaphorically, it serves as the cut required by Jewish law to seal sacrifices and covenants.<sup>392</sup> Blood and water flow from the site of the stab wound.<sup>393</sup> These real body-fluids function metaphorically as the organizing principles around which the church will arrange her primary sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.<sup>394</sup> Blood and water become the identity-markers of belonging to Christ's body, the church. Jesus' body, even in death, is therefore still communicating. His dead body is united to, and exceeds, the earlier tradition of temple sacrifice, which it takes up and makes new, while also proclaiming the future of the as-yet nascent church. A more contentious metaphoric layer concerns the blood and water which are discharged at birth by labouring women. Jesus' discharge of these fluids renders Him a metaphoric mother.

Recognition of Jesus as mother has been a minor interpretative seam within the church and was the subject of a study by Caroline Walker Bynum.<sup>395</sup> Bynum investigated the imagery used in spiritual writings by twelfth-century religious, finding that Jesus' gender fluidity resonated with medieval mystics such as Julian of Norwich (1342-1430), who wrote explicitly that Jesus is our mother. Such a reading, sensitive to metaphor, that sees in the gospel presentation of Jesus signs indicating His transcendence of his sex, positively gives expression to Jesus' divine nature, in which no human sex is present. It also provides ballast against an over-articulation of the male.

A major potential drawback is its implications for actual women, including the real flesh-and-blood women present at the Crucifixion, such as the Holy Mother. Linn Marie Tonstad, for example, is critical of Balthasar's reading of Jesus as divine in a feminine, receptive mode, as she finds his reading over-rides the actual Holy Mother, whose female body is transmuted into Christ's

---

<sup>392</sup> Glick, 19.

<sup>393</sup> For confirmation that the spear would have been likely to have punctured the heart, and for uncoaguable blood from the heart, and water from pericardial effusion, to be expected *post mortem* indications of the wound, see F. P. Retief and L. Cilliers, "Christ's Crucifixion as Medico-Historical Event," *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7, 26, no. 2 (2006): 307.

<sup>394</sup> Henri de Lubac discusses Tertullian's symbolic linkage of Eve coming from the side of Adam, and the church from the side of the crucified Christ. Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 54. Tertullian, *De Anima* XLIII.

<sup>395</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother : Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (London: University of California Press, 1984).

body, the church.<sup>396</sup> If Jesus on the Cross is understood as being sexed male but gendered female, does this neutralize real women? Feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, thought so. For her, interpretations of Jesus as an androgyne diminish the value of women by masking an inherently andro-centric symbol system which allows for the male to represent the divine and the creature, but the female to only represent the latter.<sup>397</sup>

In arguing for women to be admitted as priests, Elaine Storkey commits to a theory of representation that allows for difference in form between the representation and what it represents. A contra position is taken by the 1976 "Declaration from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*," concerning the inadmissibility of women as priests, which argues that, lack of scriptural or historic precedent aside, women could not function as representations of Christ as they do not share his male form, and so do not have a natural resemblance to what they would signify. Storkey is critical of what she sees as a failure to maintain a distinction between a representation and a representative;<sup>398</sup> (for Storkey, a priest as a representative of Christ could be either male or female; a representation of Christ would necessarily be male). Storkey's distinction does not apply to the priestly original, though, as Christ is both the representative standing *for* man and the representation *of* man. Ruether's contention that Jesus absorbs the female seems to be affirmed, not defeated. There is, though, an important Christological reason for Jesus' having been born male. Had He been born a female from a woman, His birth could have been construed as a case of (admittedly, extraordinary) parthenogenesis, so casting doubt about any postulated divine involvement in the conception. If this female *Jesus* were suspected of having his origin only in the earth, he would, in fact, not be a man, according to Judaeo-Christian understanding.<sup>399</sup> As the Genesis myths agree, 'Adam' originates from

---

<sup>396</sup> Linn Marie Tonstad, "Sexual Difference and Trinitarian Death: Cross, Kenosis, and Hierarchy in the *Theo-Drama*," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>397</sup> See Ruether.

<sup>398</sup> Elaine Storkey, "Who Is the Christ? Issues in Christology and Feminist Theology," in *The Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell, Studies in Theology and Sexuality (London: T&T Clark), 108.

<sup>399</sup> Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, 41.

beyond the earth, not only from it. As it is, Jesus' maleness ensures that parthenogenesis is neither an implication, nor a possibility, of His birth, and that He is (in one of His natures) entirely human.

Veronica Brady offers a reminder of salutary distinctions that pertain concerning the different valences of *sex* and *gender*.<sup>400</sup> While the biological distinctions signify difference, and so exclusion, maleness and femaleness, following Jung, are psychological traits which each person has. Brady's deduction that 'sex' is biological whereas *masculine* and *feminine* are imaginative constructs, significantly under-articulates the pervasiveness of sex differentiation throughout the body, and too neatly detaches biological sex from styles of thinking, relating, and engaging with the world. However, in as far as each person 'possesses possibilities which are both "masculine" and "feminine"', those qualities are complementary, not antagonistic nor exclusionary.<sup>401</sup> Endorsing Hélène Cixous (1937- ), Brady posits *masculine* and *feminine* as two economies of interaction. The male economy is more concerned with understanding the world via rational and abstract thinking; the female economy with understanding via attuning to the bodily and intuitive. This broad demarcation has much in common with the ungendered categories of 'daylight' and 'dream' thinking proposed by Les Murray as being different but complementary modes of rationality, both of which must be present in satisfying poems. It is this unification of male and female, or 'daylight' and 'dream,' within the crucified Christ, without rendering Him androgyne, which speaks of His being a poem to be interpreted. He is the poly-valent symbol.

The scriptural metanarrative of salvation history illuminates this seam of Jesus' poetic figuration. Being fully human, the flesh of Jesus represents Adam of the *old* creation. Within the old order, new life springs from *old* life, each generation newly-sprung from the preceding one. As one 'born of woman,' Jesus participates in this pattern. Jesus also participates in an exceptional way in the pattern of spiritual birth expressed in the Abrahamic succession story, where his lineage is not only through the flesh (Ishmael) but through spiritual connection (Isaac). Jesus therefore

---

<sup>400</sup> Veronica Brady, "Female Imagery and Imaging and the Experience of Theology," in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell, Studies in Theology and Sexuality (London: SCM, 2003).

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



unites in His body descent via the flesh and via the spirit. This unification of the old and the new is present at the Cross where the issue of blood signifies *blood descent* and the water, *spiritual descent*. The ‘radical incision’<sup>402</sup> in Christ’s side is the new cut marking and sealing this new sacrificial and covenantal beginning. What is notable is that the spiritual nature of the sacrifice does not supersede nor erase the physical nature. The Cross does not effect a *spiritual* birth in the sense of one that by-passes the body; it is spiritual only by virtue of, in and through, the flesh. Read according to the concerns of Brady, et al., Jesus does not laud abstraction (*spiritualism*) over the different mode of knowing in and through the body’s concrete materiality.

The gendered poetics of Jesus’ crucified body is evident with his piercing by a Roman *lancia*, a phallic symbol. The reading becomes a de-potentialized, feminized Christ being literally shafted with a publicly visible opening.<sup>403</sup> When Jesus’ body is read as maternal, the side wound functions metaphorically as a transposed vagina. As *vagina* is a direct borrowing in English from the Latin, meaning a sheath or scabbard, the epistemological linkage in this episode between the opening forged by the sword in the flesh, and the female genital, is especially acute. The body of Christ becomes inscribed in His flesh as a figure of womanly receptivity, opening up layers of metaphoric relationality: Christ the son, now figured as a mother, whose actual mother is figured as His daughter, the first-born from His crucified maternal body. His mother, *reborn* in gospel text, is also re-figured in the church imaginary as the bride of the Son.<sup>404</sup>

The latent erotic dimension embedded in Jesus’ side wound, as it is read above, is also hinted at in relation to a different body part, post-resurrection. In Matthew’s gospel, Mary Magdalene and the ‘other Mary,’ on recognising the risen Christ, ‘came to him, took hold of

---

<sup>402</sup> Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, 44.

<sup>403</sup> In the painting, *Risen Christ*, by Bramantino, (c. 1490, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid) the whole composition directs the viewer to the side wound, indicated by the Christ figure’s left hand, and exposed by the dropped shroud. The hand wounds are minimized, the Christ figure’s eyes directly engage the viewer; the right arm hangs by the side with palm turned to face the viewer. All the elements of composition convey a costly openness.

<sup>404</sup> Ingrid Kitzberger notes Mary's narrative rebirth within John's gospel, alongside her spiritual rebirth. See Ingrid R. Kitzberger, "Stabat Mater? Re-Birth at the Foot of the Cross," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3-4 (2003): 478.

his feet, and worshipped him' (Mt. 28:9). As 'feet' was a first-century euphemism for genitals,<sup>405</sup> a latent erotic overtone seems unavoidable. In contrast, the risen Christ of John's gospel commands Mary Magdalene not to hold on to him (John 20:17), as he had not yet ascended to the Father. This prohibition is gender-specific, though. Thomas, who had earlier insisted to his fellow disciples that he would not credit accounts of Jesus' post-death appearances unless he could feel his flesh-wounds, was instructed by Jesus to 'Reach out your hand and put it in my side' (John 20:27). Tina Beattie draws attention to the Bernardo Strozzi painting, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, in the National Gallery, noting its 'implicitly sexual overtones.'<sup>406</sup>

Christ's side wound can be read as symbolic echo, or imagistic transfer, of Adam's side opening from which God extracted a rib with which to fashion Eve (Gen. 2:21-22); both male figures *birthing* females, so that analogically, *church* is to *Christ* as *female* is to *male*. The unity of male and female in each set of figures suggests 'somatic homogeneity' (cf. TOB 21:6). Christ's body as birthing mother signals a restitution of the homologous man which John Paul II notes precedes sex differentiation.<sup>407</sup> As with the Adamic side opening, Christ's opening is imperceptible by Him as He, too, is 'asleep.' Unlike Adam's opening, Christ's is retained visibly within His resurrected body. This final wound of Christ goes some way to answering feminist concerns about a supplementary and subordinate feminine *complementarity*, of the type raised by Elizabeth Johnson.<sup>408</sup> The *new Eve* of the church does spring from the side of the new Adam but through a vaginal opening startling, yet appropriate for a birth, but riddling in its destabilizing metaphoric

---

<sup>405</sup> Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*, ed. Gareth Jones and Lewis Ayres, *Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 244.

<sup>406</sup> Beattie, *Woman*, 152. It should also be mentioned, though, that the painting images an ambivalent scriptural event. Although Thomas had made his belief in the Resurrection conditional upon his seeing and feeling Jesus' Crucifixion wounds, there is no positive evidence that he did touch them after seeing them (cf. John 20: 24-9).

<sup>407</sup> The sexual organs of male and female are homologous during early gestational development, penis and clitoris developing from the one embryonic organ. See Britt-Marie Schiller, "Representing Female Desire within a Labial Framework of Sexuality," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 60 (2012): 1162.

<sup>408</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing, 1996), 103.

resonances. The phallus is no longer ‘the supreme power.’<sup>409</sup> It exists alongside the maternal power of the vagina.

The seepage of blood and water from Jesus’ body demonstrates the ‘permeability of Christ’s corporeal boundaries’<sup>410</sup> which allies him with a ‘monstrosity’ that had come to be strongly associated with women’s bodies by the twelfth century. The opened body of the dead Jesus becomes both that which excites compassion (so, images of the *Pietà*) and rejection. It is at once the abjected object and the object of veneration. In this paradox of seeming-opposites is further invitation to read Jesus’ crucified body as poetic text. The breaching of Jesus’s body-boundary by lance and by the released fluids figure His body as one not self-contained and self-bounded. In this, too, His body metaphorically figures the female more closely than the male, situating Him within the ‘feminine economy’ of Cisoux. His body, we could say, in a real sense, cannot be nailed down. This will be confirmed by the transformed and resurrected body which will be available as sustenance of the church community.

The two piercings: through the side, probably into the heart, of Jesus, and the ‘sword’ into the soul of the mother, though recorded in different gospels, are linked in the metanarrative. They form one instance of a series of parallelisms connecting the lives of Mary and Jesus.<sup>411</sup> The generative son and the generative mother each instantiate motherhood in ways which affirm the importance of the body. The Son gives his life, that is, His body, for the life of the world; the mother gives the life sprung from her body, as body, to that same world. Each is donating that which most precious belongs to each: the son his total body-self and the mother her total (because

---

<sup>409</sup> Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2nd, revised and expanded ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 85. Steinberg explored a minor but intriguing strain of some two thousand religious images that depicted Christ’s penis, either naked, or referenced in hand gestures and decorative motifs. He found an erection motif recurred in some Crucifixion images to signal future resurrection, the triumph of life over death. Steinberg argues that Christ’s penile tumescence *post mortem* is a sign of Christ’s volition, *ibid.*, 323-4. Steinberg also acknowledges the maternal strain in the topos of the side wound, but he argues for its being strictly metaphorical, expressive of the consolation of Christ’s presence, *ibid.*, 373-7.

<sup>410</sup> Sarah Alison Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*, Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2010), 110.

<sup>411</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight : The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750* (Berkeley, CA ; London: University of California Press, 2008), 40.

only) issue. It is this generative donation, total in its plenitude, that links Mary and Jesus to each other and to the 'eternally generative Father';<sup>412</sup> each connected in radical openness and sacrifice for the lives of others.

#### ***5.2.4 Open lips***

There is no scriptural record of Mary's having spoken at the Crucifixion, and only four occasions that do attribute direct speech to her: in dialogue with the angel (Lk. 1:34, 38); her Magnificat to Elizabeth (Lk. 1:46-56); her interrogation of the boy Jesus when he remained at the Jerusalem Temple (Lk. 2:48); and at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:3, 5). While these can seem meagre in number, they express an array of speech types which interrelate. They can be fruitfully read according to David Ford's hermeneutic of the moods of grammar. Ford used his hermeneutic as a means of exploring the various cries of Christian Wisdom. The obvious extension of Ford's hermeneutic is therefore to apply it to Mary who has been associated in Marian liturgies with Holy Wisdom since at least the eighth century.<sup>413</sup>

Ford attends to the formal usage of grammatical moods: indicative, imperative, interrogative, subjunctive and optative but does not limit himself to understanding these literally. He entertains a broader application of them where one mood can be inferred or implied by a text written in another mood. One mood may resonate with others without the usual formal identifiers, as for example a question being raised without a question mark used, or subjunctive possibilities suggested without the use of 'may' or 'might'.<sup>414</sup>

Applying Ford's hermeneutic to Mary's speech we see the affirming indicative of the angelic greeting in Luke 1:28 echoed in the strong declamations of Mary's Magnificat. There is a double affirmation in this: she affirms her confidence in the imperatives of God's promises that she will bear a son who will rule 'forever' and in this reciprocation affirms the initial

---

<sup>412</sup> A. J. Kelly, "Mary and the Creed: Icon of Trinitarian Love," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2004): 20.

<sup>413</sup> Sarah Jane Boss, "The Development of the Virgin's Cult in the High Middle Ages," in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 169.

<sup>414</sup> David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

affirmation directed towards her. She is affirming having been affirmed. Mary's interrogative to the angel's communication of God's imperative, 'you will conceive,' does not express doubt that these words are from God. Her question implies a subjunctive openness; a 'how may this be?', rather than the suspicious hauteur of Zechariah whose question, 'how will I know that this is so?' is an inferred imperative demanding of God a sign to confirm His own promise. Mary's subjunctive-interrogative is answered by the angel in a continuation of the indicative mood of affirmation with which the scene opened. Her question is respected and answered by God without giving specifics as to the *how*. The angelic answer is delivered as a series of imperatives but these do not effect closure. The dialogue maintains the open possibilities of the subjunctive.

Trust in God's word is maintained in the brief dialogue, not erased. Mary's *fiat* is an assent made in trusting faith because the answer she received to her wondering question was under-articulated. In Mary's *yes*, the indicative, imperative, subjunctive and optative moods converge. The declamatory 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord' speaks to the nature of her servanthood. She is the one who lets go of self in order to realise the potential of self through the surprising possibilities of God. She is the one fully, authentically and simply present ('Here am I') who opens up to, and rests in, the subjunctive through her desire that God's subjunctive possibilities may be fulfilled in her (optative).

The crown of this intersection of moods is Mary's Magnificat, the dominant grammatical mood of which is the indicative. Mary affirms the mercy, strength, justice and loving faithfulness of God. This, though, is enfolded within Mary's optative mood of desire for the Lord ('My soul magnifies the Lord, / and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour') and therefore for the humble, the lowly and the hungry. Mary affirms by invoking the historic faithful relationship of God with her people. As God is eternal, such relationship is also current. By her affirmation Mary implies the obedience (imperative) that God is owed and that she gives. This whole is nested within the implied question: what is the basis of my confidence in God? On what grounds do I optatively affirm, 'Surely, from now on all / generations will call/me blessed'?

The next words Mary speaks are as ‘his mother’ when she chides him for having caused anxiety when he was missing from his parents for three days at the Jerusalem Temple. Although framed as a question, it contains a mild accusation implying they were treated negligently (indicative). The interrogative is prompted by the disjunction between the parental anxiety and the boy’s calm assurance ‘sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions’ (Lk. 2:46). His action is performative of the subjunctive mood as he is behaving in a way that ‘amazed’ his hearers and ‘astonished’ his parents. Jesus answers Mary’s interrogative with two questions of his own which do not really seek answers, yet are not rhetorical in the usual sense of not inviting an actual reply. Jesus does intend to stimulate a response but one where the recipients interrogate themselves. Jesus returns the chiding of his mother by asking, ‘Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ which is simultaneously a suggestive affirmation of his own desire for the knowledge and for the presence of God.

The last of the direct speech of Mary is in the Fourth Gospel at the wedding feast of Cana. Knowing that the celebratory wine has run out, Mary solicits the attention of her son with a simple indicative, ‘They have no wine.’ Embedded within this indicative is an imperative: ‘Help them!’ Jesus’ answer, which can read as dismissive or disinterested, (‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?’), seems to interrogate instead the desire of his mother that he take some extraordinary public action and in doing so, disclose himself. Jesus’ enigmatic reason for his seeming unconcern: ‘My hour has not yet come,’ makes sense within the embedded plea of Mary on the hosts’ behalf. Her implied cry of ‘help them!’ could be rendered as ‘save them!’ (from social embarrassment). Jesus’ reply would then mean that He had correctly understood her plea to ‘save them,’ so making it a private word-play between them. As Jesus does then intervene, performing His first public miracle, and thereby beginning the public salvific revelation of Himself, this reading seems plausible. Mary’s own response to Jesus’ talk about His hour shows no sign of awkwardness which also militates against a reading that would have Jesus’ words to His mother as dismissive or critical. She has confidence that, knowing of the need, He will act to meet it. Her final words in scripture are the ones she then utters to the servants: ‘Do whatever He tells you.’

Read figuratively, these words speak ex-textually directly to the reader. Mary has the authority to issue imperatives to the servants of the household (including those now in the household of her son) in order to facilitate His saving action in the world. Her imperative anticipates the Johannine instruction, ‘be doers of the word, and not merely hearers’ (John 1:22), linking together implied listening and acting; the performance of the two constituting obedient faith. Her words constitute the foundational rule of the Christian life and are therefore fitting as the final words she imparts to the world.<sup>415</sup>

Mary’s words came from the lips of her mouth. Luce Irigaray, though, speaks of the need to incorporate women’s labial *lips* as part of a rebalancing of conceptual frameworks and language so as to include the female. Rallied by Irigaray’s idea, psychoanalyst, Britt-Marie Schiller, proposes such a labial framework for representing female desire. In keeping with John Paul II, that difference between male and female conditions the experience of man, she rejects the proposals of others to frame the language of sexual development in neutral terms as this fails to offer a specifically female alternative to the dominance of the phallus in representing desire. Schiller allows for the conceptual distinctions between sexuality, gender and sex but insists they are ‘experientially intertwined.’<sup>416</sup>

Suspending considerations of gender and resisting a claim of a single experience of female sexual pleasure, Schiller does nevertheless argue for a specifically female pattern based upon commonalities of body morphology.<sup>417</sup> Schiller’s labial framework tries to articulate the manifold erotic sensations of the woman conceptualised according to ‘a dynamics of fluidity and viscosity.’<sup>418</sup> This contrasts with, and balances, the phallic linear paradigm of sex. Searching for the language to express this means devising different metaphors, such as ‘vibrations in a magnetic

---

<sup>415</sup> Mary’s words are directly paralleled in the final words of the Father to the attendant disciples at Jesus’ Transfiguration, recorded in all the synoptic gospels: ‘Listen to him!’ (Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35).

<sup>416</sup> Schiller, 1163.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., n2.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 1173.

field' or 'waves breaking on the sea shore'; metaphors that express 'effusion and expansion' rather than a phallic restoration of equilibrium.<sup>419</sup>

Schiller is attempting to formulate conceptual representations that accommodate the full range of female sexuality. Schiller examines via the Demeter-Persephone myth how female sexuality and the maternal have been split, following Irigaray's reading of the myth as sexuality being assigned to the father/male and affection and reproduction to the mother/female. One attempt within that particular myth to redress the balance is the inclusion of Baubo, the old woman who, to alleviate Demeter's distress, lifts her skirt to expose her genitals, causing Demeter to laugh and her depression to lift.

The Virgin Mary as mythical type seems to conform to this separation of sexual arousal and maternity; to be one of Irigaray's Symbolic '*blanks* in discourse.'<sup>420</sup> There is, though, a visual motif of the vulva with which both Mary and Jesus are connected: that of the mandorla or *vescia piscis*. This is an almond-shaped lozenge, depicted vertically, within which is an image of Jesus or Mary. Currently, the most widely-recognised depiction is likely to be that of Our Lady of Guatemala. The almond-shape corresponds to the pudenda. Up until their official prohibition at the Council of Trent (1545-1563),<sup>421</sup> wooden and stone carvings of Baubo-types had been incorporated within some European Christian churches. The products of deeply-embedded folklore, most extant *in situ* examples are distributed in rural churches, notably in Ireland. Barbara Freitag's investigation into such *sheela-na-gig* figures led her to concur with obstetrician, Erling Rump, that they are depictions of a labouring woman.<sup>422</sup> They were figures to aid successful parturition, their exaggeratedly enlarged pudenda, flagrantly displayed, and their vertical posture, often squatting, giving visual encouragement. Freitag suggests their incorporation into parish church buildings would have been part of a deliberate strategy of enculturation, one of the

---

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 1174-5.

<sup>420</sup> Maria Mar Perez-Gil, "Mary and the Carnal Maternal Genealogy: Towards a Mariology of the Body," *Literature and Theology* 25, no. 3 (2011): 309.

<sup>421</sup> Barbara Freitag, *Sheela-Na-Gigs: Unravelling an Enigma* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 115.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 49-50, 69.



adjustments made being their relocation high up to discourage touching or other types of veneration.<sup>423</sup> Their meaning within a church context Rump sees clearly as the *mater ecclesia* through whom all parishioners were born. He also draws attention to its spiritually protective presence from which the Devil would flee as it was through the vulva that his greatest enemy, Jesus Christ, entered the world.<sup>424</sup> The highly-stylised church paintings of Jesus and Mary enclosed within a mandorla are linked to their roles, and the role of the church, as fertile, fecund, and generative. It is a visual-poetic rendering of the sacred mother.

### 5.3 Expanding (uterus)

#### 5.3.1 'Virgin Mother': the paradox of converged boundaries

The pregnant woman is both herself and not herself, restructuring the concept of singleness and deepening the concept of unity. This paradoxical nature of pregnancy helps illuminate the paradoxical relationship that Christians see as pertaining between the presence and absence, or withheld presence, of God-in-the-world. The earliest stages of pregnancy are usually indiscernible to third parties. When the fetus has developed sufficiently so as to alter maternal body shape, it has made its preliminary entrance into the world. Now occupying the liminal ground between actualised presence and withheld presence, it becomes a visual, anthropological representation of the coexistence of transcendence and immanence. The gestating fetus which cannot be ordinarily seen, touched or imagined, signs that which is beyond human knowing. However, owing to its maternal mediation, the fetal presence is indirectly seen in the mother's changed shape and indirectly felt through her body, so is in some ways imperfectly knowable.

---

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>424</sup> The Eastern Church developed an icon-type, the 'Hodegetria,' of Mary as the one who 'points the way to Christ.' Martin Warner suggests Mary is so fully invested in this expansion of her radical maternal relation that she can be seen 'as the very walls of our church building.' Martin Warner, *Say Yes to God: Mary and the Revealing of the Word Made Flesh* (London: Tufton Books, 1999), 6. Cf. Peter Fingesten, and his account of how European Medieval cathedrals became allegories not only of the cruciform Christ, but, from the twelfth century, of Mary: 'The doors, now symbols of her virginal organ, lead into the interior which resembles a dissected female body.' Peter Fingesten, "Topographical and Anatomical Aspects of the Gothic Cathedral," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 1 (1961): 18.

There is an analogy in the signage between a pregnant woman and the Eucharistic signage. The sign of the consecrated host is seen with the eyes of the body as immanent matter. This sign conceals the Holy Presence so that someone unfamiliar with, or resistant to, Eucharistic practice may say of it: there is nothing there beyond the sign. Christian orthodoxy, strongly expressed in Roman Catholic doctrine, sees the sign as revelatory Presence of Christ; the apparent nothing in reality, a something, (Someone), who is received in faith. The Living Presence is believed to be veiled by the opaque sign of the consecrated bread.

Something of this paradox is sensed upon the discovery of a human pregnancy: the non-pregnant womb is transformed upon conception into a place of presence, the developing someone veiled within the flesh of the mother. A sense of the co-existence, or inherence, of transcendence and immanence was registered by Eve when she cried out upon giving birth to her first-born: 'I have produced a man with the help of the Lord' (Gen. 4:1).

Mary signified as *virgin mother* expresses paradox so acute it seems in danger of collapsing under the strain. The boundary of each term contests its neighbour's, threatening the viability of the union in an extreme example of the non-equilibrium of paradox. The affective resonance of the term differs according to one's sex. For a man, *virgin* may be one to whom he could properly direct sexual desire (the concupiscent version being *virgin* as the boundary he wants to trespass). *Mother* thwarts male desire as it resonates with his memory of his own mother, the ultimate taboo sexual boundary for him. The term, *virgin mother*, signals the tension inherent in the linkage of unrealised sexual potentiality and maternal-sexual realisation. Part of this tension Luce Irigaray would attribute to the history of socio-sexual politics. She claims that societies are premised upon the exchange of women and that mothers as 'reproductive instruments' must be 'private property, excluded from exchange.' This system leaves sexually inexperienced women vulnerable to commoditisation: '*The virginal woman, on the other hand, is pure exchange value. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men.*'<sup>425</sup> For women, the

---

<sup>425</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 185-6. Irigaray's distinction between the non-exchangeable currency of women as

resonances of the term are other. *Virgin* is a term to which a woman relates as bodily subject. While a virginal woman may choose to retain or forego her virginal status, it may also be improperly taken from her. The term is therefore one freighted with an edge of bodily vulnerability. While a virginal woman may experience strong sexual desire, the possibility of pregnancy resulting may powerfully modify that desire as pregnancy for her is a personal possibility.

In the linkage of the two words, *virginity* impacts on *motherhood* in three modes: the conception (*virginitas ante partum*), the birth (*virginitas in partu*), and the on-going motherhood of Mary (*virginitas post partum*). In the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, the writers are in agreement concerning the virginal conception. Each constructs his story from different sources<sup>426</sup> so as to make clear the exceptional conditions of Jesus' conception without a human father. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1:1-16) lists the lineage of fathers who begat sons, the final verse, though, carefully and deliberately recording a variant: 'Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.'<sup>427</sup> This mark of discontinuity is affirmed two lines later: 'When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit' (Mt. 1:18b) and iterated a third time by the angel who appears to Joseph in a dream (Mt. 1:20). In the Lucan narrative of the Annunciation, Mary is three times within nine verses referred to as *virgin* (Lk. 1:26-34). The angelic announcement says of Mary: 'And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son' rather than using the usual formulation of 'giving a son to' her husband (cf. Lk. 1:13). There has been uncontested acceptance of Mary's virginity at the time of Jesus'

---

mothers versus the fungibility of virgins has been overturned by the burgeoning reproductive industry within the last generation. Changes socially, medically, and legally, have meant increasing splits within the concept, *motherhood*, as for example between *biological*, *gestational*, *social*, and *legal*. Women in their child-bearing capacity, or in even more reduced terms, as *providers* of the biological material necessary for creation of an embryo, are increasingly viewed as the new fungible currency. For discussion of the legal, medical and ethical issues surrounding the commercialisation of body tissues, see Donna Dickenson, *Property in the Body: Feminist Perspectives*, Cambridge Law, Medicine, and Ethics (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>426</sup> Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, DE ; Dublin: Michael Glazier, Inc. ; Dominican Publications, 1982), 357.

<sup>427</sup> James Lagrand notes that the fathers' begetting is listed thirty-nine times using the active voice in contrast to the conception of Jesus where, uniquely, the passive voice is used. See James Lagrand, "How Was the Virgin Mary 'Like a Man'? A Note on Mt. 1:18b and Related Syriac Christian Texts," *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. fasc. 2 (1980): 7-8.

conception since the earliest days of the church so there has not been ‘direct action by the Teaching Authority’<sup>428</sup> concerning this.

The *virginitas in partu* has had a less unanimous reception although denial of it has not been widespread.<sup>429</sup> Post-Vatican II saw much questioning of theological positions once deemed untouchable. The notion of Mary’s perpetual virginity was scrutinised and efforts made by some Roman Catholic theologians to press the doctrine so as to answer modern scepticism of it. Karl Rahner contributed to the debate with a chapter in his *Theological Investigations* which he called ‘marginal notes’ on the subject.<sup>430</sup> Rahner is delicate and nuanced in what he writes. He upholds Mary’s ‘bodily integrity,’ or that she is ‘*semper virgo*’ as a matter of faith but calls for ‘a certain reserve’<sup>431</sup> as to the content of that designate. Rahner points out that the exact meaning is not clear from Patristic sources,<sup>432</sup> some of whom understand it to mean preservation of the hymen during birth, some as pain-free delivery, and one (St Ephraim) as the hymen restored after parturition.<sup>433</sup> One of the difficulties of claiming Mary’s body was unaffected (‘incorrupt’) by the birth is that this could lead to Docetism, that is, claiming a birth that somehow bypassed the vagina and was not really of the body.<sup>434</sup> Rahner concludes that the affirmation that can be made, which is in keeping with Church doctrine, is that Jesus’ birth from Mary was ‘unique, miraculous and virginal,’ but that ‘this proposition, which is directly intelligible, does not offer us the possibility of deducing assertions about the concrete details of the process, which would be *certain* and *universally* binding.’<sup>435</sup> Rahner’s position is carefully attentive to the specific statements of the early Fathers and resists making assumptions about how the perpetual virginity of Mary is to be

---

<sup>428</sup> O’Carroll, 359.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>430</sup> Rahner, *More Recent Writings*, 4, 136.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 138 n15. Rahner also cites Clement of Alexandria who wrote in the late second century that only ‘some’ held to Mary’s *virginitas in partu*. This minority Rahner sees represented in the mid-second-century apocryphal infancy narratives whose nativity accounts, he notes, have ‘an unmistakably docetic tinge,’ *ibid.*, 148-49.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 152-3.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 139-40. Rahner says Pope Martin I, at the Lateran Synod of 649, stressed that ‘Christ did not pass through Mary as through a fistula.’

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 162.

understood while nevertheless adhering to the doctrine. Rahner sits within the tension of the known (or knowable) and the unknown (or unknowable), ceding ground to neither but perhaps leaning towards the latter.

One generation later, in his contribution to the “ARCIC Working Papers on Mary,”<sup>436</sup> Jean-Marie Tillard sketches a position that tries to distinguish between two broad types of gospel writing, each of which is truth-bearing, but in distinctive ways. They are, he says, ‘two complementary ways of transmitting the same revealed truth’: the ‘*descriptive*, based on historical evidence’ and the ‘*interpretative*, trying to make clear the inner signification.’<sup>437</sup> Tillard illustrates this by referring to the nativity details in the Matthean and Lucan gospels such as the choirs of angels, the brilliant star in the sky, and the pilgrims appearing, and calls them ‘beautiful poetical or symbolic images,’ further elucidating: ‘Such language does not “describe”. Strictly speaking, it “reveals”’.<sup>438</sup>

This assertion of Tillard’s is contentious for two reasons. Firstly, it begs the question of who determines what is descriptive and what interpretative, and what criteria is used to make that determination. The criteria he implies for the category distinction he sets up is whether or not the description is consonant with a scientific world-view. If it is not, then it is relegated to the category of interpretation which in Tillard’s scheme amounts to an attractive fiction; a weak kind of dispensable *poetry*. Tillard’s category distinction sees interpretation as an interpolation of subjective opinion upon objective fact. Secondly, Tillard begs the question of why descriptive language cannot also be revelatory. In Tillard’s scheme, physical reality carries a restriction that limits it to being only *of the earth*; something that only ever conforms to known rules of expression. Interpretation is a supplementary act of the mind; interiority essentially detached from what is observable exteriorly. His allowance that revelation is discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who aids

---

<sup>436</sup> Jean-Marie R. Tillard, “The Marian Issues,” in *Studying Mary: Reflections on the Virgin Mary in Anglican and Roman Catholic Theology and Devotion*, ed. Adelbert Denaux and Nicholas Sagovsky (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

persons in perceiving the ‘transcendental elements’<sup>439</sup> of events, does not help overcome this interior-exterior divide, nor that between *description* and *revelation*. Although he says what should be resisted is ‘the temptation to reduce everything to the descriptive, the chronological, the obvious, the empirical,’<sup>440</sup> his position does not present complementary ways of knowing so much as mutually exclusive. His presentation of poetic ‘truth’ sounds more like poetic fiction, so for example, in his saying of Mary’s Assumption, it is ‘a poetical vision which is not to be understood literally.’<sup>441</sup>

By contrast, in his 1995-7 series of General Audiences on the Virgin Mary, John Paul II tended strongly towards affirming the literal and descriptive. Of the *virginitas ante partum*, he points to Luke’s account as not just the ‘development of a Jewish theme’ or as ‘the derivation of a pagan mythological legend.’<sup>442</sup> Contra Tillard, who says the poetic language expresses the inner signification of events and that this way of revealing a *kairos* discloses truth, John Paul implies they can diminish a correct reading of a biblical event, so: ‘The structure of the Lucan text (cf. Lk. 1:26-38, 2:29,51) resists any reductive interpretation.’<sup>443</sup> *Reductive* here means reading as a weak symbol, metaphor or other literary device, what was intended to be read as objective realism. John Paul further says ‘several recent interpretations which understand the virginal conception not in a physical or biological sense, but only as symbolic or metaphorical’<sup>444</sup> are to be rejected; neither is the event a theologoumenon.

As the Pope was himself a poet, it seems unlikely that he was positing a literal, factual reading at the expense of a metaphoric one. In his 1995 letter to women, in words that more closely echo those of Tillard about the truth-disclosure of poetic language, he had said of the Genesis creation stories they were written ‘in language which is poetic and symbolic, yet profoundly true.’<sup>445</sup> John Paul is speaking of ancient mythological texts, not the much more recent gospel text.

---

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>442</sup> John Paul II, "The Virginité of Mary, the truths of faith," (July 10, 1996), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1996/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19960710.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19960710.html). General Audience. §1.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>445</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

The latter is written as testimony of historical events and persons from one already convinced of their extraordinary import. As the Lucan gospel contains information dependent upon first-hand disclosure, notably the Annunciation scene, it may have been given directly as a first-person testimony by Mary.<sup>446</sup> While allowing for the differences between different biblical texts, John Paul strongly affirms the plain sense of the gospels, which, he says, ‘contain the explicit affirmation of a virginal conception of the biological order, by the Holy Spirit, and this truth has been endorsed by the Church from the earliest formulations of faith (cf. CCC, 496).’<sup>447</sup> That the Lucan account presents a recapitulation of the much earlier Old Testament material concerning the Ark of the Covenant is not, for John Paul, to suggest that it is a literary fiction, consciously constructed as a parallel typology.<sup>448</sup> It is both a literary presentation of events that happened, and an arrangement of those events which provokes recognition in those familiar with the earlier scriptures.

John Paul’s intention concerning the virginal conception seems to be to retain the co-existence of the plain meaning with the poetic without seeing the latter as negating the former, nor of its discounting the historicity of the event. John Paul is reiterating the gospel tradition which had not been subject to much challenge until after Vatican II. He is disallowing a distance between the words *virgin* and *mother*. Each term is to be accorded its straightforward meaning, and together, through contemplation, the composite term can unfold further layers of meaning. He is concerned to safeguard the reliability of words and their connection with primary meaning. The gap implied with Tillard’s rendering of ‘descriptive’ and ‘interpretative’ language, notwithstanding his talk of their complementarity, supports their distinction but not their unity.

John Paul II, despite initial appearances, supports a unitive approach. While seeming to rein-in poetic readings, John Paul’s retention of the literal instead opens up the concrete and

---

<sup>446</sup> The Lucan gospel opens with a declaration of authorial intent: ‘to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us [...] after investigating everything carefully’ so that the reader would ‘know the truth’ (Lk. 1:1-4), words which indicate an interest in an historical hermeneutic and, as his pre-birth narrative indicates, an interest in biography.

<sup>447</sup> John Paul II, “The Virginity of Mary, the Truths of the Faith,” (July 10, 1996), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1996/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19960710.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19960710.html). General Audience. §3.

<sup>448</sup> Cf. Boss, editor’s introduction to *Mary: The Complete Resource*, 3.

material. Paradoxically, it is his approach which opens Rahner's 'space' for 'what is uncertain and unanswered.'<sup>449</sup> This unitive, or spousal approach, is present in the designate *virgin mother* which John Paul explicitly references in *Mulieris dignitatem*, saying virginity and motherhood 'united in her in an exceptional manner, in such a way that one did not exclude the other but wonderfully complemented it' (MD 17). In the same document he writes of the peaceful co-existence of opposites within consecrated virginity: 'virginity is not restricted to a mere "no", but contains a profound "yes" in the spousal order: the gift of self love in a total and undivided manner' (MD 20).

Mary's paradoxical body ushers in the ultimate paradox of the god-man. Paradox is a category favoured by Henri de Lubac in his ecclesiology as being particularly supportive of the expression of mystery.<sup>450</sup> Mary's unique motherhood also expresses her continuity and discontinuity with the religious past of her people. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger sees Mary's improbable maternity within the context of the 'unblessed-blessed mothers' of Israel, among whom: Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Esther, and Judith. Infertile or otherwise powerless women become the ones wherein the power of God manifests itself. Mary's motherhood works within the logic of this religious inheritance: she is the lowly one for whom 'the Mighty One' does great things. Ratzinger sees a deeper dimension to Mary's motherhood, which sets her apart from her womanly forebears. As *Theotokos*, Mary 'is more than the organ of a fortuitous corporeal event. To bear the "Son" includes the surrender of oneself into barrenness [...] barrenness is the condition of fruitfulness.'<sup>451</sup> The 'barrenness' is Mary's emptying of herself into the will of the Father, signed biologically by her virginity.

---

<sup>449</sup> Karl Rahner, *Faith and Ministry*, trans. Edward Quinn, vol. 29, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 228.

<sup>450</sup> N. Halloran, "The Flesh of the Church: De Lubac, Marion, and the Site of the Phenomenality of Givenness," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2010): 34-5.

<sup>451</sup> Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, 52. Ratzinger sees the unity between the Jewish and Christian scriptures as essential for understanding Marian dogmas which cannot be deduced from the New Testament alone. When the scriptural unity is lost, 'healthy Mariology is lost,' veering either towards 'rebellion' or 'dangerous romanticism.' *Ibid.*, 32.



John Paul II writes from the same perspective when he says of virginity and motherhood that they are ‘two dimensions of the female vocation’ which complement each other and are united in Mary (*MD* 17). He means by this the sacrificial giving of the whole self to God, including one’s sexual and reproductive potentialities. This utter *yes* to God, even freely taking on barrenness, is the means by which God confers blessings of fruitfulness; in Mary’s case, concrete fruitfulness that springs from the ground of her virginal barrenness. She is the anticipatory sign of voluntary virginity for the sake of the ‘kingdom of God’ (Mt. 19:12), not perhaps an entirely new possibility for God’s people<sup>452</sup> but radically expanded within the new covenantal relationship. It becomes a mode of participating in the freely laid-down life of the Son: the virgin or ‘eunuch’ freely lays down passing on her/his family lineage. Freely given sacrifice, as modelled by her son, inverts notions of blessed and unblessed and becomes a new way to live for the furtherance of God’s rule. Mary’s virginity overturned the Old Testament typology of the *cursed* infertile woman. Instead, sexual renunciation, signed as virginity, becomes wedded to fruitfulness. In electing consecrated virginity, women are affirmed as worthwhile independent of their potential to bear children, and, in their giving to others, realise a different kind of fruitfulness. Such virginity is an expression of the so-called radicalism of the Gospel; of leaving all to follow Christ. It is therefore a state not only of self-denial but of self-giving and the concomitant self-reception this brings.<sup>453</sup>

This gift of the self can be understood via the analogy of the gestational uterus. John Paul II explicated Christian anthropology in *Mulieris dignitatem*: ‘Being a person means striving towards self-realization [...] which can only be achieved “*through a sincere gift of the self*”’ (*MD* 7). The uterus realizes itself in its dynamic pattern of supportive self-donation, stretching and

---

<sup>452</sup> Michael O’Carroll notes that the ‘general rule’ may have been to equate blessedness with offspring for a first-century Jewish woman, whether ‘voluntary childlessness’ was unheard of is ‘not certain.’ O’Carroll, 364.

<sup>453</sup> *Virginity* as representative of the non-child-bearing woman also accords with the fertility pattern of women whose natural biological reproductive phase is about thirty years in length, or under half her life-expectancy. Most women can expect to live decades without the possibility of pregnancy, so need symbolic access that affirms this pattern.

enlarging to accommodate the maturing fetus. The uterine enlargement is not a passive displacement. At term, the uterus will have increased ten-fold in weight with a ten-fold increase, between week ten and delivery, of uterine blood volume.<sup>454</sup> The uterine boundary is secure and concrete but also plastic, engaged in a *speech pattern* of chemical dialectic. Within this speech pattern, it performs a series of alterations and adjustments cyclically and intra-cyclically and within a pregnancy's term. In response to hormonal signals, the endometrium thickens so as to fashion itself as a receptive site of a conceptus. Endometrial receptivity is realised by different chemical markers which variously ensure it continues its *rolling* movement prior to implantation, repels it from those areas with a poor chance of implantation, attracts it to a more suitable site and ensures adhesion to the endometrium. *Boundary* is here dynamic, responsive and alterable while retaining its own integrity as organ. Its properties are not arbitrary but exist so as to foster life.

### **5.3.2 Boundary transformation: The Crucified Christ as birthing mother**

The expansive uterine boundary is given painterly allegorical expression in the West as the *Mater misericordiae*; in the East as the *Pokrov*. Mary stands with her mantle outstretched in a wide, inclusive embrace while numerous adult children huddle within its protective reach. Her mantle functions as a figure of her uterus which held all when it held the god-man, and so is competent to offer refuge to all people. Mary imaged thus as maternal protectress is modelled upon Christ's outstretched arms on the Cross. Reversing the direction of the analogy, Christ's crucified form interpreted as embrace figures Him as welcoming all who would approach. Mary, in a figuratively less complex way, iterates this welcome, co-operating in the provision of protection for all who seek it.

The shared maternal imagery of defensive protection extended to the other, binds Mary and her son, each of whom has been understood as *labouring* to bring forth children of God. Mary as the mother who brought forth Jesus both physically and spiritually, continues to bring forth his brothers and sisters in the faith, co-operating with her son in doing so. Mary's mantle read

---

<sup>454</sup> Sally et al Collins, *Oxford Handbook of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 with corrections), 30.

as uterus or uterine membrane is analogous to Christ's enactment of metaphoric birth on the Cross, where His body, stretched upwards, downwards and sideways, enacts uterine gestational, or parturient vaginal, stretching. This figuration of Christ as natal deliverer stands within a history of biblical birthing tropes associated with God's salvation, such as the parting of the 'birth canal'<sup>455</sup> of the sea, and the bloody lintels of the doorways at Passover.

As noted above, (5.2.4), the imagery of the Johannine passion narrative has the male Jesus seemingly appropriate the maternal feminine. In Nancy Jay's words, the Cross could seem an instantiation *par excellence* of 'birth done better.'<sup>456</sup> I have suggested above that this is not the case; that Jesus as male is figured as one of strongly articulated feminine traits of nurturance, openness, and boundary porosity. A different but complementary perspective comes from the field of anthropology.

Anthropological studies have documented an almost universal trans-cultural practice of *couvade*, that is, fathers' culturally-prescribed behaviours during and after birth which may entail acting out labour pains.<sup>457</sup> Daniel Boyarin proposes, contra Freud et al., that male envy of the female body may be at play.<sup>458</sup> Inverting the classical Freudian notion of penis envy (that is, a female purportedly perceiving her own genitals as a lack, so envying the male who has the organ she desires), Boyarin sees this 'phallus-myth' as a constructed 'mythic opposite' (itself a kind of *couvade*) which obscures the male's real desire: to be female. The counter-part of this myth is castration anxiety or being rendered 'female.' Boyarin, though, counter-intuitively interprets even the counter-myth as masking 'the fear of *not* being female'.<sup>459</sup>

---

<sup>455</sup> Natan Margalit, "Priestly Men and Invisible Women: Male Appropriation of the Feminine and the Exemption of Women from Positive Time-Bound Commandments," *Association for Jewish Studies* 28, no. 2 (2004): 311. The narrative connection with the bloody lintels is quite explicit as Jesus' Crucifixion took place on the day of preparation for the Passover.

<sup>456</sup> Nancy B. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xxiv.

<sup>457</sup> Torborg Lundell, "Couvade in Sweden," *Scandinavian Studies* 71, no. 1 (1999).

<sup>458</sup> Daniel Boyarin, "Jewish Masochism: Couvade, Castration and Rabbis in Pain," *American Imago* 51, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Boyarin here follows A. M. Cooper (1986).

As ingenious as Boyarin's interpretation is, it does not satisfy. The castrated male is still chromosomally male. He is not rendered 'female' so much as 'neither male nor female.' As Jesus in the gospels shows no fear of, or aversion towards, women, a case could be mounted that the crucified Christ takes upon Himself the deep castration phobia by virtue of His body enacting sexual indeterminacy, as explained above.

If Jesus is figured metaphorically as female, then in a chiastic refiguring, Mary becomes male. Read according to the *couvade* trope, Mary at the foot of the Cross occupies the symbolic place of the father, or other male support. One of the reasons for a male presence at a birth was to share, if only secondarily and empathetically, the wife's pain and anxiety, and to hopefully mitigate it by his presence.<sup>460</sup> The linkage of the Simeon prophecy (Lk. 2:35) with Mary's presence at the Johannine Crucifixion strengthens this reading of Marian *couvade*. She, as metaphoric male, functions as the faithful and loving spouse, who shares so fully in the birth pain that she experiences it in herself.

Mary's spousal relation with her son does not negate her maternal relation. As she stands beneath the Cross, Jesus declares his mother to be mother henceforth of the 'beloved disciple' who is present in his own personal capacity and as representative of the nascent church, the body of believers. Notably, Jesus calls her 'woman' as He had at Cana. This would indicate that she is addressed as in a triple modality as individual, as representative, and as type.<sup>461</sup> Jesus' words are declaring, so establishing, a bond between the believing community and His mother, so that the church will share in their maternal-filial unity.<sup>462</sup> Mary's motherhood is therefore honoured by its expansion, by divine command, from the individual to the corporate. The Christ-ordained implication for her new children becomes: honour her.

---

<sup>460</sup> Lundell, 97-8.

<sup>461</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*: on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church, (1987), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031987\\_redemptoris-mater.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html). Encyclical. §21 and 23.

<sup>462</sup> Howell, 210.

It is by virtue of having been the good mother that Mary becomes the ‘helper meet,’ or ideal spouse, to Jesus, aiding Him in the on-going work of salvation, helping maternally to shape believers into the body of her son; the ecclesial body that is figured imaginatively as the bride of Christ. The metaphoric shift that sees Mary the mother figured as spouse of her son can seem to contemporary minds as disconcerting as medieval paintings of Mary and Christ as lovers.<sup>463</sup> Motherhood can, though, be construed analogously as a spousal relationship between mother and child as it echoes the intention (‘I take you’) and the promise (‘to be mine’) of the wedding vows. Motherhood, not only marriage, can be construed as a sign of the mystery of God’s self-gift as spousal love.

A reading of the crucified Christ as a realization of the impossible – male birth – reprises at His death the impossible boundary-crossing that took place at the Incarnation in the Virgin. Mary’s presence as birth assistant or doula recalls her words of self-identification as the ‘handmaid’ of The Lord. It is not motherhood that is usurped by Christ’s birthing body but the culturally-assumed dominance of the phallus. In Christ’s body, by contrast, the power is in the wounds, open and bleeding. His body upon death has become an open invitation to enter inside it, the two-in-one of pregnancy now the two-in-one of believer and Christ, a body statement that the nature of that unity far exceeds the moral. The union is ontological.<sup>464</sup> Christ’s body has become a dwelling place and in a metaphoric mirroring expressive of the mutuality of relationship, the believer in turn is to become a dwelling-place for Christ, as was Mary. This is metaphor expressed concretely. Consistent with the human experience of embodiment, the human body is not ‘an object placed before us’ but the ‘environment in which we dwell.’<sup>465</sup> The Johannine crucified Christ can be read as expressing the structure of metaphor in the connection

---

<sup>463</sup> This motif appears in a thirteenth-century painting of Mary’s Assumption by Cimabue in the apse of the Franciscan mother church in Assisi. See Lavin.

<sup>464</sup> M. Isabell Naumann, "The Anthropology of Father Josseph Kenterich and the Image of Mary," in *The Virgin Mary and the Theology of the Body*, ed. Donald H. Calloway (Stockbridge, MA: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2005), 237.

<sup>465</sup> Jose Granados, "The Body, the Family, and the Order of Love: The Interpretative Key to Vatican II," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 39, no. 1-2 (2012): 202.

between the related terms (here, of *male* and *female*) and of the distinction between them; of Jesus being male according to His humanity and neither male-nor-female according to His divinity.<sup>466</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus' death unifies the two modes by which social groups establish belonging: via familial, blood relations, and via the strategy of establishing male patterns of descent according to ritual prescriptions. In Jesus' death, the two lineations of descent, maternal and paternal, form a unity of the two. The spear wound is a composite sign of the blood of birth (female) and of battle (male). Jesus' death does not operate to the exclusion of women and mothers. It reconciles in His person the social and ritual competition between the modes of descent and identity formation, reconciling them. The bounds of the metaphoric predication of Jesus as birthing mother are that Jesus is male; that followers are invited to dwell in His death; and that the site of gestation is His *uterine* heart. The metaphoric meaning has not erased Jesus' male body but its illocutionary message is that Jesus' maleness is not *ad idem* with the phallus. Salvation is not simply a case of *mankind saved by a man*, but of *mankind saved by God who was born as a man of a woman*. It is not Jesus' maleness that saves. Salvation comes from God via mankind in his fullness, male-and-female.

A straight-forward interpretation of the crucified Christ as the one who bridges in His body male-female distinction, restoring the homologous man of creation, is problematic in as far as it is a male body which has *absorbed* the female. While His opened body invites entry and signs the possibility of birth, Son gestating mother-church, it need not be rejected, according to Nancy Jay's criticism, as male appropriation and *improvement* of birth. Rather, it follows the metaphoric precedent of Genesis where the male, Adam, is opened to enable the *birth* of another. As noted by John Paul II, it is upon discovering an adequate relation 'to' a person, that one is then able to open up more fully in a 'communion of persons' (cf. TOB 9:2). Jesus on the Cross reprises this opening; a reading which

---

<sup>466</sup> However, this is not the final word on the matter. As Graham Ward has noted, the body of Christ was transposed to the broken bread by Christ Himself, and 'Jesus' body as bread is no longer Christ as simply and biologically male.' Ward, 103.

retains, rather than abolishes, male-female identities. The Cross is the place where ‘the two shall become one’ (Gen 2:24; cf. TOB 10).

#### 5.4 Strengthening, effacing, dilating (cervix)

The lower part of the uterus, the cervix, functions variously to aid conception, support the growing fetus, and aid the delivery of the baby at term. It undergoes extensive changes during gestation and parturition. The non-pregnant cervix is predominantly made up of collagen proteins which are rigid and non-extensible. These collagen bundles are densely and irregularly packed. During pregnancy, the cervix undergoes extensive remodelling, becoming palpably softer owing to increased water concentration. It increases in mass and tensile strength through the reorganisation of collagen. The realigned collagen fibres are remodelled into a structurally stronger pattern that allows the cervix to support the fetus *in utero*. The second structural change reverses this procedure; the collagen degrading and dispersing prior to cervical effacement and dilation at the onset of labour.<sup>467</sup>

This pattern of cervical remodelling offers possibilities for a metaphoric reading. One of the criticisms of some feminists concerning the construal of Mary within the church is the over-determination of what could be called her *effacement*. The associations of effacement are of modesty, withdrawal from sight, insignificance and erasure. Such concepts have come to be particularly associated with the Virgin Mary. Tina Beattie criticises Augustine’s (and consequently, the church’s) construal of Mary’s humility before Joseph, as absorbing her into prevailing social codes: ‘domesticated and incorporated into the law of the father through an emphasis on Mary’s modesty, humility and silence’;<sup>468</sup> designators strongly associated with self-effacement.

John Paul II in *Redemptoris Mater* seems to understand Mary’s consent at the Annunciation in such terms. In paragraph thirteen, he praises the attributes nominated in Vatican

---

<sup>467</sup> E. Albert Reece and J. C. Hobbins, *Clinical Obstetrics: The Fetus and the Mother*, 3rd ed. (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 639-40.

<sup>468</sup> Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate : A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation*, 177.

II's document, *Dei Verbum*: “submission of intellect and will” (*DV* 5) and “the obedience of faith” (*DV* 5). While these qualities were directed towards God (and so were entirely fitting), they are vulnerable to being disproportionately associated as virtues of the female, opening the way to their being appropriated by ecclesial hierarchies to serve patriarchal ends. The structural changes of the cervix prior to effacement redress this balance and also put a different gloss upon *softening* which is not associated with lack (of resolve, courage, et cetera), but with strengthening. The partnership of softening and strengthening has strong biblical resonances. *Hardness of heart*, meaning obdurate refusal of critical self-examination, or ingratitude to God, is a constant theme. The opposite, *the heart of flesh*, is the soft heart which is the heart strengthened through its admittance of God.

Sarah Coakley, in her call for a theological and trinitarian perspective on gender, looks to ‘bodily practices of prayer’ which involve contemplative silence as the condition which particularly facilitates progressive transformation of spirit.<sup>469</sup> One of its chief advantages, for Coakley, is that it ‘inculcates mental patterns of “unmastery”’ by patiently waiting upon God and relinquishing self-dominion in the practice of contemplation.<sup>470</sup> This is part of Coakley’s defence of systematic theology against criticisms that it represses areas of knowledge that have traditionally been associated with the feminine. Coakley realigns purported theological *knowledge* of God as that knowledge which is unlike any other; more a transparency of the subject before God’s knowing. In this sense, she can talk of Christian contemplation being a ‘bodily practice of dispossession, humility and effacement.’<sup>471</sup> Coakley re-centres effacement as an ascetic practice that is the ground of attentiveness to the other.

Within the gospel context, Marian effacement operates positively. While Mary appears on few occasions, each is at a crucial narrative juncture that covers the whole span of Christ’s life: conception (Annunciation); the inaugural mission event (Visitation); Nativity;

---

<sup>469</sup> Sarah Coakley, "Is There a Future for Gender and Theology? On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task," *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 85, no. 2 (2013): 52.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



dedication to God in the Temple; the precocious start to His teaching ministry in the Jerusalem Temple; the inauguration of His public ministry (Cana); the occasion when Jesus teaches about how the *family* of God is constituted; the Crucifixion; and Pentecost. Luke's gospel is the one most interested in the earthly genesis of Jesus and the only one to record the Annunciation, Visitation and Presentation; key episodes of Jesus' earliest life reliant on, or notable for, Mary's presence. Luke's inclusion of a pericope, (Lk. 8: 19-21), where Mary seems entirely overlooked (*effaced*), is highly significant. Told that His mother and 'brothers' are waiting outside for Him, Jesus responds with the words, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' in seeming reproof; the adult Jesus apparently trying to redress the maternal over-determination of His lineage. His answer to His own question: 'Whoever hears the Word of God and does it,' undoes that initial assumption. Mary is pre-eminently the one who heard and did the word of God, hence the words of Pope Benedict XVI: 'It is Mary's obedience that opens the door to God.'<sup>472</sup> Mary and His brothers have not been superseded but recast within a hugely expanded familial network. Jesus reveals that the human biological family is a metaphoric analogy for the intimate type of relational unity each person can experience with God. It speaks of an ontological bond unable to be unmade. This enduring strength of bond can be consciously invoked by any and all of God's *children*. Human blood-bonds provide a strong analogy of the bonds between those who internalise the Word of God. Applying this logic to Jesus' reaction to the interruption of Mary and his brothers, Jesus is not repudiating his son-ship of Mary but properly contextualising it within her first having lived as 'Daughter Zion.' His response *effaces* focus on their biological connection only so as to *dilate* their spiritual one. That such effacement does not amount to erasure is confirmed by Mary's presence at the Cross in John's gospel where she is given as mother to the 'beloved disciple' (representative of *church*).

The cervical *thinning* serves a specific good and is the necessary action prior to dilation. The softened cervix, preparatory to the thinning of effacement, involves remodelling and

---

<sup>472</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 56.

physiologic cell death. While caution may well be in order so as to not press the metaphor too keenly in its applicability to Mary, and to women as a group, this notion of voluntary (and partial) deconstruction in order to facilitate the bringing forth of another life correlates with Jesus' strongly-worded injunction to lose one's life in order to gain it (cf. Mt. 16:25) where *loss* is of personal self-determination which is voluntarily ceded to God. Seeing the maternal cervix as such a correlate is benign because it does not involve permanent loss or damage. The deconstructed cervix institutes a process of repair, possibly beginning even during dilation, so that a future pregnancy cycle will become possible. Cervical effacement is a pattern of active and self-giving support for another, which is repeatable.

In the action of dilation, the cervix is metaphorically linked with the other organs of dilation: the eyes. Unlike the swift and unconsciously performed optical dilations, cervical dilation is slow, painful, and intrudes upon consciousness. The constant modifications of the pupils operate unnoticed, increasing or decreasing the entry of light so that sight can continue. Vision has historically been considered pre-eminent of the senses. In his article exploring the nature of Christ's Transfiguration, José Granados attaches particular importance to divine glory having been manifest in Christ's human body as this enabled it to be witnessed by others.<sup>473</sup>

Sight is an operation of the eyes but the particular sight they render is related to the whole body; that is, the whole life of the creature. Philosophically, human sight has been linked to human mobility; that we see because we move. Vision therefore is a synthesis of sight and movement.<sup>474</sup> Sight enables the input of constantly adjusted data concerning depth of field so that a person can successfully navigate through space. This linkage between sight and movement occasions an embedded, implied gospel word-play where in-sight comes through admitting more L/light which is always moving.

---

<sup>473</sup> Jose Granados, "Embodied Light, Incarnate Image: The Mystery of Jesus' Transfiguration," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 22. Granados here draws upon the work of philosopher, Hans Jonas.

The experience of seeing is the basis of a metaphoric strand in the gospels relating seeing to spiritual insight, which is that which moves the believer on in the pilgrimage of faith. Mary in Luke's gospel is associated with this type of spiritual dilation. Her insight is directly connected by the gospel writer with Mary's mode of seeing the world contemplatively; an 'ingathering' of her experiences.<sup>475</sup> Mary ponders the angelic greeting (Lk. 1:29); the account of the shepherds (Lk. 2:19); and finding the child Jesus in the temple (Lk. 2:51). John Drury has seen this confluence in Mary of sight, fruitful contemplation, and knowledge in The National Gallery's painting of the Annunciation by Fra Filippo Lippi who depicts the stream of heavenly light beamed into the *eye* made by the parted tunic over her stomach.<sup>476</sup> In Lippi's painting, associations of vision, heightened inner sight, dilation and fecundity coalesce. Mary is the seer whose *vision* is that of her whole person which she has allowed to be dilated by the Light of God. In this she exceeds the later disciples of her son whom He often castigates for *blindness* which He implies is wilfully chosen.

Mary's deep-sightedness is not to be confused with perfect understanding. Mary in Luke's account is not given data that would satisfy her understanding. She consents on the basis of *dark* faith that will gradually be enlightened throughout her own life-pilgrimage. In one of his published sermons, Rowan Williams upends the usual idea of the Divine Light by expanding upon an image of Dionysius: God as a 'ray of darkness.'<sup>477</sup> God's light dazzles the eyes into blindness; light registered as dark. This is light so searing that it interrupts and upsets human certainties and meaning-making: 'I have to find a new way of knowing myself, identifying myself, uttering myself, talking of myself, imaging myself.'<sup>478</sup> Luke's Mary is prepared to welcome this incomprehensible Light. Her trusting incomprehension is narratively balanced with her expressive Magnificat. Neither silenced nor blinded by her encounter with God, her Magnificat praises God

---

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 25. Granados here follows Gabriel Marcel.

<sup>476</sup> John Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and Their Meanings* (New Haven, CT ; London: Yale University Press in association with The National Gallery, London, 1999), 48-54.

<sup>477</sup> Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness* (Lanham, MD ; Plymouth, UK: Cowley Publications, 1995).

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 100.

with expectant trust that He will institute His justice in a disordered world. Her dilated understanding knows that all things will be made new but not the means by which this shall be so.

Cervical and optical dilations are related in their contrasts and inverse mechanisms, as well as in their rude mechanical similarity. Optical dilation allows more light to enter the body; cervical dilation allows more light to enter the world, where *light* is a figure for *life*. One of the recurring biblical figures for God is light. As human life is made in the divine image, if God is understood as light, then human life, too, is imbued with light (cf. Lk. 11:33-36 where Jesus speaks of a lamp on a stand, saying, 'Your eye is the lamp of your body'; that is, the eye as emitter, rather than receiver, of light.) The Nicene Creed expresses the intra-Trinitarian mission of the Son from the Father as 'Light from Light.' Every human birth can be read as a recapitulation within the natural order of the divine mission, 'light from light' whose ultimate light-source is the Father.

Even prior to conception, the cervix acts as enabler. Cervical mucus facilitates possible conception. It alters in viscosity throughout the menstrual cycle, increasing in volume and fluidity at the time of peak fertility. The maximal mucosal elasticity at this phase, together with the increased mucosal hydration, facilitates sperm penetration into the uterus. Filtering out sub-optimal sperm, the cervical mucus guides healthy sperm along structural troughs or runnels that run the length of the cervix. When sperm does come into contact with an ovum, it does not aggressively force itself inside with the troubling associations of that conceptual frame. Rather, the binding sites of the sperm and the surface receptors of the ovum co-operate prior to penetration of the ovum.<sup>479</sup> In addition to not invoking aggressive hierarchy, this model recasts female receptivity into an active, co-operative partnership. The mucosal plug that fills the cervical os after conception prevents pathogens from entering the uterus, keeping the uterine environment aseptic.

---

<sup>479</sup> Steven J. Ory and Marcelo J. Barrionuevo, "The Differential Diagnosis of Female Infertility," in *Principles and Practice of Endocrinology and Metabolism*, ed. Kenneth L. Becker (Philadelphia, PA ; London: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2001), 1016.

Altering the language used of the mechanics of conception alters the conceptual framework by which it is understood. Word choices descriptive of biological processes convey secondary meanings of a political nature. Mary Shivanandan analysed the findings of feminist ethnographer, Emily Martin, who had investigated the language choices of the main medical textbooks used at John Hopkins University during the few years prior to her study to determine what messages they conveyed about the male and female reproductive systems.<sup>480</sup> Shivanandan commends Martin's critique of the texts' language, finding that it favoured male tissue and actions over the female, so for example, the transformation of spermatid into sperm is 'remarkable', the 'sheer magnitude' of sperm production a 'feat.' This valorisation contrasts with the words chosen to describe menstrual shedding: 'losing,' 'dying,' 'denuding,' 'debris'. Martin finds the ascription of cultural sex stereotypes regarding masculine and feminine, so the imputed passivity of the ovum moving along the fallopian tube where it 'is transported,' 'is swept,' 'drifts.' The sperm on contact with the ovum is 'penetrating,' 'burrowing,' so as to 'activate' conception. Such stereotypically gendered language usage undermines any absolutist claims of its being a neutral way to transfer information. It embeds a particular world-view which is competitive, dualistic and hierarchical; male pitted against female. Conception framed in a language of invasion, conquest and hostility is highly problematic. Shivanandan contrasts this aggressive textbook vocabulary with that from the paradigm of natural family planning. Of the fifteen natural family planning manuals she studied, she found differing language choice of uniting, meeting, and co-operation. This alternative language scheme declines to view the sexual act or conception as inherently competitive or hostile. Shivanandan found this gentler language of mutuality correlated with biological research current at the time of her writing in which conception was being revealed as an act of cellular co-operation.

The softened, effaced, and dilated cervix forms a portal through which the fetus descends into the world. This association of the open doorway that allows passage into an alien

---

<sup>480</sup> Mary Shivanandan, "Body Narratives: Language of Truth?," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3, no. 3 (2000).

environment, never before experienced, but for which one was always intended, correlates with the Christian understanding of personal life extending beyond physical death, hopefully into union with The Divine. Jesus' death communicates this notion of death as a doorway into something beyond, through the cluster of gospel images surrounding His death: solar eclipse, earthquake and the tearing of the temple curtain. This metaphoric cluster registers the poetic domain the reader has entered.<sup>481</sup> The solar occlusion, temporarily plunging the visible world into darkness, expresses in the celestial order the extinguishing of the One who had lived as light on the earth. As it is an occurrence in the natural order which is beyond human manipulation, and as it is concurrent with the death of Jesus, it is understood to be spoken by God; a dramatic visual metaphor for the benefit of those who see, record, and read of it.

As the shadow of the earth passes in front of the sun, the two spheres, the solid solar and the shadowy terrestrial, which appear to be the same size when viewed from the earth, overlay each other. The shape formed at the two points of intersection as the earth's shadow is in the process of visually transecting the orb of the sun is the *vescia piscis*, the lozenge shape of the female pudenda, site of intimate entry. The eclipse signals the formation of a portal in the heavenly realm; Jesus' death restoring the possibility of divine-human communion. The image of solar eclipse is multi-valent. It is a sign of destitution (the life-giving light/Light no longer shines on earth); a sign of judgement (God sending the ominous signs simultaneously of solar erasure and earthquake), and of hope (God has opened a portal to Himself). The earthquake expands the affective range of the signs and serves as metaphoric balance to the eclipse. An earthquake is felt with the whole body and is possibly audible. While no mention is made of fractures and fissures opening in the earth as a result of the quake, they frequently accompany violent tectonic activity. The heavenly portal now signed, through which people may, pending their assent, *ascend*, is balanced by a suggestion of a possible *descent* into the depths of a shaken, riven earth.

---

<sup>481</sup> *Metaphoric* and *poetic* are not intended to mean *contrary to what actually or physically took place*. They are used to indicate that the images interact among themselves, and with the actual event of Jesus' death. Both of themselves, and in their relationships, the metaphors communicate meanings which elucidate, echo and illuminate dimensions of the meaning of Jesus' death on the Cross.

The Lukan and Matthean gospels also record the rending in two of the temple curtain at the Crucifixion (Lk. 23:45; Mt. 27:51).<sup>482</sup> These curtains are commonly agreed to have been those that screened off the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. They constituted a highly symbolic opaque veil that represented all created matter.<sup>483</sup> In passing through them once a year at *Yom Kippur*, the High Priest was passing beyond earth, through the visible heaven into the celestial realm, impenetrable and indiscernible to human eyes, where God dwelt. Applying the cervical trope to them, they protect (God's people from God's intolerably holy presence) and enable (expiation of sins, annually, through the temple cult). As a portal, they 'represented the division between the material world and the spiritual.'<sup>484</sup> Those who pass from the heavenly side through the curtain become visible by taking on flesh; the High Priest who passes through from the opposite direction changes his vestments to angelic white linen. Margaret Barker draws attention to their great size and extreme weight: 'two hundred square metres of wool and linen fabric.'<sup>485</sup> Both gospels mention they were 'torn in two,' with the Matthean emphasising the extent of the rent: 'from top to bottom.' Both gospels signal this as a divine action which ruined their functionality as a cultic boundary.<sup>486</sup> That which had concealed God's dwelling-place is now effectively removed, opening access to what had been denied.<sup>487</sup>

Mary's presence at the Crucifixion adds another dimension to the rending of the temple veil. Mary's womb containing the gestating Christ has been understood as a personal embodiment of the Holy of Holies. One of the correspondences between the two is in their structure of separation; the holiest inner sanctum of the temple the *raison d'être* of the temple's

---

<sup>482</sup> Luke's gospel situates the tearing of the temple curtain just prior to Jesus' death. Its tearing releases a prayer from Jesus commending His spirit to the Father. Dennis D. Sylva proposes this as the place of Presence being opened to allow communion between Jesus and the Father. Dennis D. Sylva, "The Temple Curtain and Jesus' Death in the Gospel of Luke," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (1986).

<sup>483</sup> Margaret Barker, "The Veil," in *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991).

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-7.

<sup>486</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199.

<sup>487</sup> These images recur in the prophetic apocalyptic text of Revelation, in which is mentioned earthquake, blackened sun, and the sky vanishing 'like a scroll rolling itself up.' Rev. 6:12-14.

architecture of progressively stringent cultic separations. Mary's uterus separates the holiest child within her own holy body from the profane world. Developing inside Mary's womb in fully human fashion, the gestating Jesus is enclosed within the uterine membrane, pierced upon His birth; birth and death linked in the poetic accretion of piercings: uterine membrane, Jesus' body, His mother's *heart* and the temple curtain. These constitute a progressive unveiling of His identity culminating in the revelatory moment of His death. The natal and terminal shared metaphor contracts the perceived distance (and difference) between them.

The extraordinary rending of the temple curtain is decoded in the book of Hebrews. The sign is interpreted as concretely signalling the meaning of Jesus' death. Jesus' salvific mission was to close the distance between the divine and the creaturely. Having already passed through the veil in order to be 'veiled in flesh' (Heb. 10:20), He is able to make the return passage to the celestial realm. As the pattern, materials and colours of the temple veil were repeated in the vestment of the high priest which was routinely worn (that is, not the linen vestment worn only once per year), there was an 'intimate connection between the two.'<sup>488</sup> The torn curtain at Jesus' death is therefore sign of His tearing out from the fleshly veil in an actualisation of the annual ritual performed by the high priest. The paradoxical sign and means by which this was effected is Jesus' torn flesh, re-signed in the torn curtain (cf. Heb. 6:19; 10:19-20); *rift* being mended by *rift* signed as *rift* in a dense metaphoric circle where the boundaries between literal and figurative, concrete and metaphoric, no longer pertain. The connection discerned by the writer of the Hebrews between Jesus' flesh and its signage in the temple furnishing made by human hands follows the pattern of signage in Christ's Eucharistic body; His flesh signed by the torn bread made by human labour.<sup>489</sup>

The temple curtain as representative of heaven marks the outermost boundary of the created, visible world. Beyond this veil is the realm of the unknown and inadmissible (except,

---

<sup>488</sup> Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem*, 124.

<sup>489</sup> This connection is not clearly apparent in current Roman Catholic liturgical practice where the Eucharistic bread is not recognizable as such. Overly refined into a crisp wafer, it is neatly snapped rather than torn.



exceptionally, once a year by the High Priest alone). It can therefore also be seen as an analogous metaphor of Mary's virgin motherhood: the boundary between the known (*virgin*; *mother*) and the impenetrable (*virgin mother*). Mary is marked in her flesh in an inverse way from Jewish males; male circumcision which sets Jewish males apart from their non-Jewish contemporaries met by Mary's intact hymen which signs her body as marked apart in its untouched integrity. Mary has long been imaginatively connected with the woman in the Song of Songs: 'A garden locked is my sister, my bride, / a garden locked, a fountain sealed' (4:12). Mary as the inaccessible garden is the one reserved exclusively for God, the One in whom she delights. The image-cluster of locked gate, enclosure, being sealed up, has quite overt associations with virginity but is equally suggestive of pregnancy. Mary's hymen as the carnal correlate of the temple curtain shares its function of simultaneously veiling and revealing the divine mystery. The rupturing of the hymen, which would usually precede any conception, is transposed to the torn curtain. Torn curtain and intact hymen share the distinctive and crucial characteristic of existing in such a way as to preclude any humanly accountable cause. The divine actor abstains from enacting any violence upon His creature. God erupts through God's own hymen-veil to enable communion with the Holy Presence. The cost of God's venture, and the marking of the body which registers it, is exacted from the body of the incarnated Divine, not His creature. (Although Mary feels a sword pierce her own heart, this is an acute empathetic piercing that does not cut her flesh.)

The church has traditionally taught the perpetuity of Mary's virginity. The passing of the infant Jesus during His birth so as not to damage His mother anticipates and mirrors the passing of the deposed, adult Jesus from the sealed sepulchre. Each passing-through is rendered indiscernible to eyes searching for physical evidence. The evidence, instead, is that which confounds the law of cause and effect. Maternal intact hymen, sealed evacuated tomb, torn temple curtain is each a sign of exceptional and confronting inexplicability which exceed and transcend the bounds of human rationality. These physical anomalies challenge the viewer or reader of them to either disregard their own eyes or the testimony of contemporary eyewitnesses, or to accept that the words reliably mean what they say. To commit to the reliability of the text is to commit

to *seeing* differently. Such seeing opens mind and heart and transforms one's perception of the real. This type of seeing becomes, as with Fra Filippo Lippi's Virgin, an act of the whole body. Such sight ignites the seer's understanding into an inflationary awareness of the possibilities of the world in which God acts and is present (cf. Lk. 1:37 'For nothing will be impossible with God').

The gate is a recurrent biblical trope of safety, protection, and boundary. The closed protective gate through which only the righteous can enter (cf. Ps. 118:20) is reiterated and elaborated in several places in the New Testament (Mt. 7:13; Lk. 13:24; Heb. 13:12). The characteristics of the trope are of a narrow gate, through which few will pass, although many will clamour unsuccessfully for admittance once the gate is shut. Jesus in the Fourth Gospel refers to Himself as the gate: 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved [...]' (John 10:9, within the larger passage: John 10:1-10). Jesus here figures Himself as the maternal gate (*cervix*) through whom all who would be born to eternal life, must pass; a message of personal exclusivity iterated later in the same gospel: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6b). In the sixth-century devotional Akathist Hymn<sup>490</sup> of the Eastern Orthodox rite, two of the vocatives used of Mary are 'door of solemn mystery' (*Ikos* 8) and 'gate of salvation' (*Ikos* 10). This prompts the question of how it is that Jesus and Mary can both be *the* gate of salvation.

One distinction to be made is that from Mary's flesh, the flesh of Christ was formed and that her maternal body was the gateway through which salvation was born, figuring Mary as the immanent gate according to the flesh, and Jesus is the transcendent gate according to the spirit. This construal alone, though, runs the risk of reducing her person to her flesh, which scripture is careful to avoid doing, and of reducing Jesus to spirit. More helpful is to draw upon the work of Trevor Hart. Developing the work of William P. Brown, *inter alia*, Hart proposes strong theological underpinning for creative works of the human imagination. Hart argues that it is possible to safeguard the absolute, unaided initial creation whereby, in a free act of donation, God chooses to generate something other than Himself while also allowing for the ongoing unfolding

---

<sup>490</sup> Attributed to Romanos the Melodist (d. AD 556).

of the created order. This unfolding in a sense completes God's original creative act. Such human collaboration is also willed by God.<sup>491</sup> This provides the basis by which it is possible to understand Mary and Jesus by the same trope. Jesus figured as birthing mother does not erase His earthly mother. Rather, the trope they share speaks of the reliable resemblance between mother and son and the relationship between them as *portals* within their respective orders. Mary as created, cosmic representative, and as specific creature, was essential for the realisation of God as an embodied human, an internal participant, within His own creation.

### 5.5 Separating (the total body)

Childbirth remains the ubiquitous and defining trans-temporal event. Even within the protective ambit of Western medical care, childbirth still exposes the mother to the primal constants of crisis: danger, desire for deliverance, and reliance on the aid of others. She is taking part in an acute way in the 'ancestral pattern,'<sup>492</sup> including experiencing at least some of the primary emotional universals: hope, fear, and love. During labour, the mother psychically withdraws from the world; her bodily experience progressively absorbing all her concentration, interest and energies. A note of dissonance is introduced by the ambivalent status of the vagina. Once the site of receptive *jouissance*, it is now the site of expulsive trauma. While vaginal plasticity is equally able to manage ingress and egress, the disparate maternal experience of birth intrudes into, and shapes the contours of, the wider sexual relationship.

Childbirth is an ambiguous event in terms of personal agency. The mother's body expends energy but such labour is not always, nor ever only, the effect of deliberate will or effort. The particular mother is the one actively giving birth but birth is also biologically determined and regulated, proceeding according to a cascade of chemical cellular signals which are activated irrespective of the mother's will. The status of the labouring mother is therefore ambivalent in philosophic terms, as birth is not unambiguously an act of the acting person. An alternative manner

---

<sup>491</sup> Hart, 124. Hart is here drawing upon the work of Colin Gunton.

<sup>492</sup> Muir, "Poetry and the Poet," 88.

of presenting it is as an act of submission to one's body. A large measure of its poetic force as typology seems to lie in the radical disempowerment of will and ego that it entails; its evocative power lying in maternal dispossession of agency and concomitant reliance on the good will and aid of others.<sup>493</sup> To labour is to be led by the body into a risky and profound new order of knowing.

The difficulty and pain of human birth redounds to the heart of 'spousal communion.' The causal relationship between sexual union and labouring birth seems ordered to sharpening consciousness of the meaning, and potential cost, of the sexual act. Coitus, designed from 'the beginning' to be organically linked to the fullness of the couple's relationship, is intended to be more than an expression of sexual drive which man shares with other animals. The sexual urge is not only biological but has an existential dimension.<sup>494</sup> It is ordered towards the continuance of the species but also towards the unique expression of the love between husband and wife. Its moral dimension arises from the conscious decision made as to whether to act upon the sexual urge. The sexual act's potential long-term outcome, the birth, nurture and education of a child, demands rational thinking. Human sexual union is intended to be an act of will exercised by both participants in love, where both willingly share in the consequences.

Interest in birth as biological event and as personal experience has burgeoned in the latter twentieth century. One of the essays from this period that has continued to be influential is Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater". This essay is approached open-endedly, looking at how it construes the gestational and maternal bodies and how this speaks to John Paul's theological anthropology.

### ***5.5.1 Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater"***

The post-Vatican II decade saw a reduction in the Roman Catholic Church's recourse to Mary as an expressive symbol. This demise of the Marian devotional cult left a representative void

---

<sup>493</sup> The nature of the birth process which is activated and progresses outside of the maternal will is a carnal sign that implicitly criticises the stance taken by the panel commissioned by Pope Paul VI to advise him concerning the moral permissibility of artificial contraception. The majority report strongly recommended allowing it on the explicitly Baconian grounds that technical mastery (that is, imposed human will) of nature was a good. Waldstein, introduction, 100.

<sup>494</sup> This is dealt with at some length in Wojtyla, 51-54, 62-63.

concerning motherhood. Stimulated by Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex*,<sup>495</sup> Kristeva intended to help fill the void by offering an analysis of motherhood. Her own pregnancy at the time of writing added an unanticipated personal, contemplative dimension to her essay, "Stabat Mater,"<sup>496</sup> which was published the following year. As her essay's title, an incipit of a thirteenth-century hymn implies, her interest is both historic – how the Virgin's sufferings at the Crucifixion helped shape the church's discourse on motherhood – and contemporary.

Kristeva's abstract mental analysis is counterpointed and tempered by her experience of pregnancy. The resultant text imaginatively registers these two strands in typological fragmentation. The left-hand column of type gives her impressions of being pregnant, occasionally interrupting the more academic text which has to flow around it in typological accommodation. Several pages of two distinct columns of print parallel the experiences of mental analysis and physical enactment (166-9; 171-5; 175-183). The poetic prose<sup>497</sup> of her pregnancy text amounts to a condensed non-systematised phenomenology, broad-ranging in what it touches upon: her pregnant self-consciousness; pregnancy as a physical and emotional state; her changed perception of her own body; awareness of her changed position in the social body of women; and her refigured self within the linguistic domain. Her dual texts enact displacement and condensation, two of the actions Kristeva, following Freud, postulates for the pre-linguistic, 'so-called *primary processes*.'<sup>498</sup>

#### 5.5.1 (a) *Pregnancy as a crisis of language*

Kristeva's pregnancy intrudes into the text – 'FLASH' (162) – with upper-case urgency, interrupting typological orthodoxy and over-riding conventions of formal presentation. The spatial irruption blocks the standard left to right pattern of reading, forcing a decision about how to

---

<sup>495</sup> Warner.

<sup>496</sup> Kristeva. Further references are given as in-text page references to this edition.

<sup>497</sup> Kristeva's use of poetic text is a strategy consistent with her theory of the emergent self within the sign-system of the symbolic. She augmented Freudian psychoanalytic theory with the Platonic term, *chora*, which she uses to denote the regulatory process that orders the drives; a necessary precursor to language acquisition. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 25-9.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

navigate the remaining text: to continue to the section-end of the academic text, or to follow the newly inserted left-hand text, or to attempt to read piecemeal, from one text to the other. Pregnancy has brought Kristeva to the edge of linguistic possibility: ‘language necessarily skims over from afar, allusively. Words that are always too distant, too abstract’ (162). For Kristeva, the gap between language and somatic experience threatens, with pregnancy, to become an abyss; the distance between observing and participating. Pregnancy has thrust her into the gap between the meaning that resides in language signs, and the reality signed which transcends the sign.<sup>499</sup>

In the experiential storm of pregnancy, Kristeva reaches for the poetic, the function of which is, she says, ‘to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through, and threatens it [that is, ‘the socio-symbolic order’].’<sup>500</sup> She therefore uses reconstituted or radically reduced syntax in the left-hand text.<sup>501</sup> By minimising syntax, the structure that aids intelligibility, she is evoking the roots or ‘mystery’ of language in the musical and rhythmic.<sup>502</sup> Grappling with the limits of communicability is at the root of her experience. Her new knowledge confounds language; the conceptus ‘unnameable.’ This apophaticism colours her reflections upon the Virgin whose son, although male, confounded the symbolic. Mary’s was the supremely ‘unnameable’ pregnancy; the ‘Word’ she carried not only electively silenced in her womb but eluding the grasp of words throughout His life.<sup>503</sup>

To be born, though, is to be born into language; each person must ‘take a chance with meaning under a veil of words’ (162). Kristeva frames language as a gamble which may or may not express real meaning. Persons are obliged to speak but speaking embroils the speaker in compromise where words obscure (‘veil’) even as they attempt to communicate. Language so framed loses its authority and its confidence. It is a none-too-reliable tool. This reductive view of language

---

<sup>499</sup> Hart, 115.

<sup>500</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 81.

<sup>501</sup> The left-hand column of text becomes less poetic the more removed is Kristeva temporally from pregnancy and birth. The passage of text transitions to prose with regularised sentence structure and analysis by the end (180–3).

<sup>502</sup> Kristeva was attentive to Mallarmé’s connection of the foundational music of text with woman. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 29.

<sup>503</sup> Cf. Mk 8:29, Mat. 16:15, Lk. 9:20, ‘Who do you say that I am?’

as ‘a kind of failure’ is one repudiated by Rowan Williams who argues instead for a more dynamic understanding of the relation between words and what they represent. Words are deployed within an evolving universe, not a fixed one, and words are part of this dynamism, present within a temporal flow. Words do not effect closure but remain open as the world is ‘negotiated’ anew with each refinement and extension of speech. Rather than a failure, language is seen to be endlessly generative, ‘prolonging or extending in another mode the life of the environment we inhabit.’<sup>504</sup> Williams is proposing what may be called a more feminized view of language and its workings which respond to, and participate in, a motile world. His alternative framing speaks to Kristeva’s concerns about the incommensurability of language and fluctuating experience. Williams’ view is attractive for its image of accommodating mutuality between words and world.

Kristeva understands language negotiations differently, according to the terms by which she sees it operating. As language belongs, within her scheme, to the male domain of the symbolic, it is part of a world that involves ‘contests and negotiations over power or [...] play and improvisation.’<sup>505</sup> She joins in this game, integrating a type of formalised improvisation in her essay through a series of word associations (Virgin Mary > maternity > language) that culminate in a word-play upon Jesus as Word-made-Flesh. Omitting both the hyphen links that signal unity, and the connective verb, her alternative ‘WORD FLESH’ keeps each of the items of the term discrete. The items are not joined but kept apart, a gap dividing them.

Kristeva construes *living* and *writing* as oscillating between the two domains of culture (‘WORD’) and experience (‘FLESH’). This oscillation generates the paradox of ‘deprivation and benefit’ (168); the binary Kristeva sees as characterizing maternity. Mary’s visible maternal body is deprived of wholeness in the Christian imaginary, reduced to ear, tears, and breast (172-3). Milk and tears are ‘the metaphors of non-speech, of a “semiotics” that linguistic communication does not account for’ (174); flesh without word. It is lactation, though, that releases from Kristeva her first address to her child: ‘My son’ (171). These simple relational words

---

<sup>504</sup> Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*, 109.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

augment the intimacy her body has already experienced, implying the interdependence of the pre-linguistic and the symbolic. The use of the possessive personal pronoun is a hallmark of the language of love and its use communicates a sense of the 'spousal meaning' of the body where a subject knows itself through belonging to another. Even after the separation of their shared gestational embodiment, their belonging together is retained and expressed analogically as ownership (cf. TOB 33:3). Kristeva shares ground with John Paul II in her experience of the interconnectedness between knowledge, language, and the body.

Both she and the pope intend in their reflections to draw upon the fullness of human experience. Kristeva reports objective changes to her body – her new self-knowledge - in highly subjective language. This convergence of the objective and subjective contributes to anthropology by reflecting, as it were, from within, what it feels like to undergo the foundational body transformation of gestation. Where her approach crucially differs from John Paul's is she makes no theological connections with her experience. Whereas John Paul saw the meaning of the person in the personal experience of being loved and of loving, Kristeva offers no sense of her relationship with her child's father and is highly ambivalent in her treatment of her maternal love. One of the ways in which her ambivalence and sense of loss associated with maternity could have spoken to theology is in its being a type of poverty in, for example, its expenditure of time and energy. John Paul theologially contextualises contemporary distortions in attitude and behaviour to the body; Kristeva looks instead to how motherhood alters her own personal perspective and functions so as to distance mothers from the paternal symbolic domain.

#### *5.5.1 (b) Motherhood perceived as somatic suffering*

Kristeva's poetic text luxuriates in physical descriptions of birth, her child, and her emotional responses to motherhood. She exposes the ambivalence she feels by mapping the effects they inscribe on her body: the baby's cry is 'tearing' (166), entering into 'my skull, the hair (167)'. The child is perceived to be 'irreparably alien' (179), and 'an inaccessible other' (178), sitting in tension with her earlier expression of their belonging and her bodily response to his cries. Her chronic perception: 'My body is no longer mine' (167) is rueful expression of feeling



subjugated by motherhood. Her maternal body is the ambivalent locus of alienation and communion. It is the strength of mother-child communion which alienates her from her own body. Even *post-partum*, her body registers the now-absent but still-present child in lactation, undoing notions of a strictly autonomous contained self.

#### 5.5.1 (c) *Motherhood perceived as alienation*

Birth is expressed as a manifestation of the Freudian death drive, with images of darkness and nightmarish displacements of her own body parts. The visibility of written text belies the invisibility of pain which words struggle to adequately articulate. Kristeva's strategy is to use unusual metaphors of spatial abstractions: 'volumes, expanses, spaces, lines, points' (168) to give a sense of pain's presence, which may be amorphous and diffuse ('volume', 'expanses'), or distractingly precise ('points'). Her metaphors suggest the challenge pain poses to linguistic expression, as it nudges on the frontier of unintelligibility.

More troublingly ambivalent are the terms Kristeva probably uses of her newborn baby, but which could equally refer to the placenta: 'a living dead,' 'monstrous graft' and 'My removed marrow.' What the terms do make clear is Kristeva's exaggerated sense of bodily disenfranchisement. The separation of birth is experienced as a severance, or split, within herself which is only weakly overcome through responding to her child's laughter (179). Her identity suffers from the dual fissures of alien maternal corporeality and her ongoing connection with the child who is alien other; experiences that become the objects of her abstract reflections. The separation of birth detaches her from herself, the birth-event refiguring her as a new subject (*mother*) within a re-worked body. Margaret Bruzelius finds Kristeva's *telos*, in spite of her desire to move outside a traditional moral frame ('herethics'), and to prioritise maternal somatic experience, leads to an unaltered position for mothers: 'they purchase speech at the price of suffering.'<sup>506</sup> Bruzelius sees this as directly connected with the *Mater Dolorosa* figure where, she says, Mary's identification with the death of her son embodies a 'collapse of identity.'<sup>507</sup> John Paul II would say

---

<sup>506</sup> Bruzelius, 227.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

that Bruzelius has misunderstood the nature of that Marian self-identification. Such identification with another is to make a gift of oneself. Such self-donation does not evacuate personal identity but is the means by which it is fully realised.<sup>508</sup>

#### 5.5.1 (d) *Male and female as competitive opposites*

Kristeva's psycho-analytic conceptual frame pits the maternal body and what it indicates: the pre-verbal, the 'division of language' (178), corporeality, against the masculine order of the symbolic: law, the analytic. She expressly links the cult of the Virgin Mary with Christianity's strong articulation of the Word, notably in the Johannine prologue, suggesting the Virgin's cult is 'compensation' (176) for something difficult to believe in; the concrete experience of mothers and mothering providing concrete ballast to the abstraction and conceptual fragility of fatherhood.

Kristeva's bipartite scheme contrasts with the conceptual frame of John Paul's *Theology of the Body* which integrates nature and language. Underpinning John Paul's primary metaphor, 'language of the body,' is a commitment to the intelligibility of physicality where the body itself, inserted into a receptive world, is part of a meta-system of intelligible, organic patterns. Male-and-female is one of these fundamental patterns, each sex inclining towards the other, recognising his or her homogeneity and complementary difference. By contrast, the father of Kristeva's child is notably absent as *father* exists within the symbolic.<sup>509</sup> John Paul acknowledges the differences between fatherhood and motherhood, noting in *Mulieris dignitatem* that a man's parenthood does not have the direct bodily mediation a mother's does. While the father is an observer 'outside' pregnancy and birth, this distinction, contra Kristeva, is held within the committed spousal relation which allows the father to 'learn his own "fatherhood" from the mother' (*MD* 18; par 6).

---

<sup>508</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 23, 24, 44

<sup>509</sup> Kristeva's right-hand text sees in the representation of the Virgin Mary a denial of the male with whom she did not conceive, 180.

### 5.5.1 (e) *Motherhood figured negatively*

Kristeva reports several negative experiences of motherhood: fractured self-identity, inaccessible otherness, and a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the male and female domains. Becoming a mother activates her own memory of having been mothered by ‘a shadow that darkens, soaks me up’ (180), even in the act of recollection, ‘Mamma: anamnesis’ (166). Mothers are viewed as social predicates participating in structures of socio-sexual-linguistic power. Maternal self-sacrifice, interpreted psychoanalytically, is that of becoming anonymous in order to pass on the ‘social norm’ (183). Motherhood on this account is a masochistic collusion with the male, rather than, as in John Paul II’s account, a fulfilment of one of the ‘dimensions of the female vocation’ (*MD* 17). Fulfilment is a holistic measure but for Kristeva, such integrated flourishing is inconceivable for a woman whose body is ‘a place of permanent scission’<sup>510</sup> between upper (head and heart) and lower (legs, signifying mobility and action) by means of the pelvis (reproductive centre). Non-integration extends to the female social body, marked by disunity and a judgmental social code, concerned with imposing regulatory admonitions; furtherance of group conformity superseding interpersonal communion. To be singular, or to aspire to singularity, is to invite the opprobrium of other women (181-2) as singularity jeopardises group cohesion.

### 5.5.1 (f) *The limits of the psycho-analytic paradigm*

Kristeva’s psycho-analytic focus interprets persons as objects of culture (cf. *TOB* 60:3); her experience of gestation and birth insufficient to redress the balance of cultural (*male*) dominance.<sup>511</sup> As God is not admissible within a psycho-analytic frame, the human is overly determined and there is no grounding of human relationships within the category of *gift*. Human relations are seen in terms of self-enhancement, self-protection and competition, even between mother and child; the group formed and maintained at the cost of the individual. Kristeva’s interpretative frame gives a disturbing overlay to her contemplation of her sleeping son: ‘neither

---

<sup>510</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 27.

<sup>511</sup> Cf. the sometime dominance of the right-hand text, for example, pages 162–166; 169–171; 183–184, which effectively silences the text dealing with the body.

being nor unborn, neither present nor absent, but real, real inaccessible innocence' (172-3).<sup>512</sup> The apophatic contours of her response to her son give way to a progressive knowledge of him but she gains fuller 'epistemic access'<sup>513</sup> to him only once he is ill, the mark of further separation and the *de facto* condition of humanity (173). Having expressed her ambivalence about group identity, her recognition of her son's inclusion in the human family ironically depends upon his exhibiting the wounded signs of belonging.

Kristeva's account of birth makes no mention of her son's father. Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach to anthropology does not have the internal resources to contextualise the maternal body within a wider theological anthropology. Suffering within a classical Christian world-view can become a way to draw near to the *heart* of God; a theme developed by Paul in the second epistle to the Corinthians, and the subject of a study by A.E. Harvey.<sup>514</sup> Paul's letter reverses the usual negative value of suffering, having come to regard his own as that which brings him closer to the suffering of Christ. The evaluation of suffering, and the suffering itself, can be transformed into a positive in direct proportion to the extent to which the sufferer offers it to Christ, enduring it for Christ. The transformative experience of birth can be understood in Harvey's terms as suffering for the sake of another's life that aligns the sufferer with Christ's labouring passion. This conformity to Christ constitutes the ongoing restoration of the divine image.

#### 5.5.1 (g) *Assessment of Kristeva's perceptions*

The typology of Kristeva's essay performs, in part, a textual destabilization; a representation of the destabilizing experience of gestation and birth. As noted, though, (n511 above), the analytic text dominates the emotional, subjective text, in some places effectively silencing it. This analytic textual dominance ironically promotes the male domain, confirming what she understood to

---

<sup>512</sup> Her infant son is not yet, on Freudian terms, a subject, as he is at too early a developmental stage. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25. Kristeva's use of 'real' contrasts with 'symbolic.' Ibid., 26.

<sup>513</sup> Hart, 93.

<sup>514</sup> A. E. Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering : A Study of 2 Corinthians*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

be entrenched male cultural determinism. Her stated intention to redress the female-maternal representational void in the church shows the strain of the attempt in the overtaking of her poetic-prose by the male language domain. This tension illustrates the problem of the possibility of *knowledge* across the divide of sexual distinction, especially when each is seen to operate within different linguistic domains (cf. McAuley's 'Annunciation'). This crisis of knowledge is exacerbated by her child with whom she feels overwhelmingly united. Her troubling sense of over-connection with her infant will be eased, though, through the child's entry into the male language domain. Upon a child's learning to speak, the mother-child separation, already actual, is easier to discern and accelerates. It is therefore the male domain that facilitates and helps realise a restored (and, at least in Kristeva's case, desired) maternal sense of individuated identity;<sup>515</sup> a co-operative pattern of male-female inter-relation that lends support to just that sort of paradigm explicated in John Paul's *Theology of the Body*.

Comparing Kristeva's difficulties concerning *knowledge* with the Genesis 4:1 account, *knowing* comes about when *Adam* understands himself as differentiated from the animals, and therefore has a sense of himself as person and as subject (TOB 21:1). John Paul comments (TOB 21:2) on the active-passive distinction within the text (man who knows; woman who is known). This seeming entrenchment of male hierarchy and female subordination John Paul rather sees as the hiddenness ('mystery') of femininity which waits until it is manifest and revealed through motherhood (TOB 21:2), and explicitly claims the mutuality of knowledge owing to the nature of the spousal relationship (TOB 21:3). While there is no hint of such knowing through begetting in "Stabat Mater," Kristeva's text orients itself at least towards the possibility of such mutual knowledge in that she as woman and as mother gives analytic attention (*male*) to gestation and early motherhood (*female*), so tentatively beginning to bridge the otherwise estranged two.

This thesis considers Kristeva's essay under the heading, 'separating' which is one of the implied and recurrent key concerns of "Stabat Mater." For Kristeva, the predicament of

---

<sup>515</sup> Naomi Stadlen, *What Mothers Do: Especially When It Looks Like Nothing* (London: Piatkus, 2004), 181.

motherhood is how to retain an interior sense of, and an actual experience of, one's subjectivity through one's mothering. Kristeva's attitude to her changed status, newly-recontoured life, and to her child expresses her maladjustment to her transitional life-stage. Her reportage of her perceptions of those transitional challenges is laudable in as far as it acts in the interests of truth by contributing to a fuller imaginary of motherhood; part of a wider secular discussion with theological relevance (Sarah Coakley's 'grope[ing] towards a more equitable representation of male and female creatureliness').<sup>516</sup> Kristeva's preparedness to face, and name, her ambivalent, even negative, perceptions of motherhood provide an alternative perspective to John Paul II's *Mulieris dignitatem*, for example, which seems to assume that mothers adjust seamlessly to motherhood, even while acknowledging it is the woman 'who *pays* directly for this shared generation' (*MD* 18). Gestation and early motherhood are personally significant for Kristeva in their felt force although she does not give a sense of how this force may be otherwise and more widely significant.

Janet Soskice sees in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity a defence against a style of egotistical thinking that does not admit true otherness. These so-called 'philosophies of the One,' identified and criticised by Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, see a subject only relating to another as a support for the ego; the other who is 'not-me' confirming the subject as 'the One.'<sup>517</sup> In "Stabat Mater," it is unclear whether Kristeva formulates herself as 'the One' or the subordinate 'other.' She appears not to see any real autonomy or sovereignty for women. Trinitarian doctrine, as explicated by Soskice, confirms John Paul II's findings through reading the creation myths that subjectivity is configured by loving relations, not in solitude.

Kristeva seems to confirm the intimation of Valerie Saiving Goldstein, whose 1960 article criticised how several of her contemporary male theologians had pictured the human condition, ascribing man's 'predicament as rising from his separateness and the anxiety occasioned by it.'<sup>518</sup> Goldstein criticized their unconscious male bias, proposing instead that the female mode of

---

<sup>516</sup> Coakley, 353.

<sup>517</sup> Soskice, "Trinity and Feminism," 140.

<sup>518</sup> Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960): 100.

experience was not of separation but of unremitting engagement with others, often at the expense of self. The distinctiveness of Kristeva's reported experience is her desire for psychic separation from her child. Unlike the usual coupling Goldstein had identified of separation and alienation, Kristeva's essay unexpectedly yokes *connection* with alienation. This unusual coupling potentially implies significant theological difficulties. Christian doctrine is based on an understanding of God as one who initiates, seeks, and desires an ongoing and substantive relationship with each of His human creatures. God as infused presence in creation, and present in multiple modes: in humans who are *imago Dei*; in the Holy Spirit; in the Eucharistic presence; in holy scripture; in His body the church; and in those who consciously know and abide in Him, may imply, on Kristeva's reckoning, a divine presence too ubiquitous; a relation too inescapably present.

The limits of Kristeva's evocation of motherhood are attributable to the limits of her psycho-analytic worldview in which there is no allowance for transcendence of either one's personal or social past and present. For Kristeva, sexual difference functions culturally as negatively discriminatory (with women colluding in their own discrimination). This worldview contrasts with the Genesis stories where human sexual difference is connecting, and through marriage and the family it often founds, binding. On the Kristevan account, sexual difference is a polarity bridged only by the subsuming of women into the symbolic of the male, rather than something that tends towards binding the two in unity. Kristeva's essay seeks to give a true account of her experiential knowledge however her experience is self-interpreted in cultural terms that do not offer a way out or forward.

## **5.6 Remaining (placenta)**

### ***5.6.1 Symbiosis***

The human placenta images symbiosis. It evades classification as either *maternal* or *fetal* as it is formed from maternal and fetal contributions. Upon implantation in the endometrium at about two weeks' post-fertilisation, the localised endometrial cells undergo cellular changes. This reaction results in the part of the endometrium underlying the implantation site forming a compact layer. This layer, the decidual plate, forms the maternal part of the placenta. Microscopic

villi extrude from the extra-embryonic cellular membrane; the fetal contribution. The placental villi allow for symbiotic exchange between mother and fetus: maternal oxygen and nutrients diffusing through the walls of the villi to enter the blood of the fetus; fetal carbon dioxide and waste products diffusing into maternal blood.<sup>519</sup>

In the placenta, maternal and fetal are each distinguishable; the two not admixed yet forming a unity of substance and function which operates, and exists, only by virtue of its twoness-in- oneness. In this uni-duality, the placenta analogically images the hypostatic union: two *natures* present in the one hypostasis.<sup>520</sup> It is both fully of the mother and fully of the fetus. The placenta expands and elaborates the divine indicative of the two becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24). It is not only man and woman who shall mysteriously become one within their spousal relation; mother and child instantiate a related, though different, redrawing of the bounds of separateness and relationship. The fleshly unity of the placenta forecloses either party claiming *ownership* of it as it belongs to both simultaneously. Paul Ricoeur identified the hallmark of metaphor as being the simultaneous presence of *cataphasis* ('it is') and *apophasis* ('it is not'). The metaphoric terms play off each other and play with each other; the dynamic interplay being the marker of 'the truthful poetic image.'<sup>521</sup> The metaphoric relationship opens the reader's capacity to see and to see differently. The metaphoric terms the placenta invites us to see differently are those foundational to relationship: *I* and *you*. The placental organ seems especially to affirm the words of philosopher John Macmurray, cited by Trevor Hart, that 'the unit of the personal is not the "I", but the "You and I"'.<sup>522</sup> More recently, Hart notes that David Ford has expressed a similar affirmation of personhood's being constituted by personal relations, Ford asking rhetorically: 'Is there any layer of self where there are no others?'<sup>523</sup>

---

<sup>519</sup> Collins, 18-25.

<sup>520</sup> The similarity of metaphor to the hypostatic union is noted in Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

<sup>521</sup> Hart, 25.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.



The placental *selves* act in symbiotic harmony as to attempt otherwise, by for example, acting competitively or in isolation, would be to collapse the whole gestational relationship. The biblical creation narratives understand each human life as being a new instantiation of the creative act of God. Eve's cry upon the birth of Cain: "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen. 4:1), is her acknowledgement that human biology alone does not account for human generation. The divine-human relationship of creative co-operation is concretely and metaphorically represented in gestation; one subject enclosed within the nourishing, cleansing divine-maternal. Within the parameter of this metaphor, *human person* is represented by the fetus. Disregard for the (divine) maternal context in which it lives would be analogous to disrupted placentation which, in a human fetus, may occasion intra-uterine growth restriction<sup>524</sup> or miscarriage.

Symbiosis is at the centre of Glyn Maxwell's investigation into the nature and mechanics of poetry-writing. Maxwell bathetically calls the poetic fundamentals '*something* and *nothing*.'<sup>525</sup> Maxwell is keen to anchor poetry-making in the physical so begins with a consideration of the blank whiteness of paper or screen ('nothing') in his chapter 'White.' For Maxwell, the imagistic qualities of poetry do not in the first instance refer to literary device. Prior to any mental images a poem may evoke, it is an image on a page.<sup>526</sup> Concrete materiality of page or screen represents potentiality and grounds the possibility of textual embodiment. Maxwell's thesis can be illustrated and supported by a reading of R.S. Thomas' poem, 'The Annunciation by Veneziano.'

#### 5.6.1 (a) R. S Thomas, 'The Annunciation by Veneziano'

Written as a poetic response to a medieval predella panel, the poem exploits the imagistic qualities of words on the page; printed form interacting symbiotically with poetic content.

---

<sup>524</sup> H. Fox, "Placentation in Intrauterine Growth Retardation," *Fetal and Maternal Medicine Review* 9, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>525</sup> Maxwell, 10.

<sup>526</sup> Maxwell is suggesting that the boundaries between *text* and *image* are porous. In related vein, M. Wynn Thomas argues for not regarding the semiotic systems within which art and poetry function as being rigidly self- enclosed, citing composite artistic images that fuse writing and painting. See Thomas, 312-18.

Thomas' poem mimetically positions the painted protagonists within his poem so as to echo visually their position on the picture plane: 'The messenger' on the left-hand side; 'the girl' on the right. The poem's second line begins with a deep indent so that it appears to be a step down from the final word of the first line. This visual arrangement both retains a connection between the lines and re-orders their disconnection. The lines, like the painted protagonists, are each one's *other* yet their stepped relationship evokes their connectedness as well as their metaphysical difference and distance. Thomas' eye is held by the empty space between the figures. It is *distance* which dominates his poem; the word itself suspended at the end of line three. Line four repeats the wide indent of line two; the arrangement of the words on the page registering spatial distance. There is a visual (and so, material) 'gap' but one that can be 'leant over'; the word placements registering both space and a visual 'bridge.'<sup>527</sup> The spatial patterning and the syntax of the opening lines interact so that 'haloed,' appearing on the left-hand side of the text, is both the angel's, being on *his* side of the painting/poem, and Mary's, as the syntax makes clear. This shared holiness is the implied *bridge* between them.

It is Thomas' use of spatial form that redeems his poem from what would otherwise be, according to contemporary sensibilities, unacceptable patriarchy. Thomas' angel is gendered male and is imputed to know what it is that 'all women desire to hear.' This authorises, by divine association, failure to invite, or listen to, a woman's words on the assumption they will affirm those of the male. Such a reading would shut down the poem's possibility of communicating truth to contemporary readers. A way is available through this seeming impasse. In his exploitation of the gaps of lineation, Thomas has constructed a poem that offers a more benign reading that does not obliterate Mary's agency. The small clusters of words positioned at the ends of those *lines* which consist mostly of white spaces, can be read as their own vertical column of text; a literal sub-text within the poem. These right-end words form a skeletal summary that enact

---

<sup>527</sup> These three images appear in another of Thomas' poems, "The Gap", from *Frequencies* (London: Macmillan, 1978), discussed in William V. Davis, *R. S. Thomas: Poetry and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 87-90.

the structure of erotic love where it is precisely the *gap* of distance which is overcome: ‘and the girl,’ ‘between them,’ ‘come,’ ‘desire to hear,’ ‘he has taken from her.’ In this sub-structure, Mary’s consent is intimated by her ‘desire to hear,’ the words now detached from the problematic line above. Mary is now the agent of desire where ‘hear’ alludes to the traditional painterly trope of the conception taking place via Mary’s ear; the place where the Word entered. Thomas’ technique of careful word placement on the page activates a two-fold symbiosis between the inspirational painting and his poetic response rendered as image, and between the narrative content and its visual representation. Thomas’ knowing manipulation of the white ground would seem to overthrow Maxwell’s thesis as blank space is here not passively present as ‘nothing.’ Maxwell himself is aware of just this; that empty whiteness is not a *tabula rasa*, but for the poet ‘it’s half of everything.’<sup>528</sup> It signs both its own presence and the potential of another presence. The whiteness, that is, operates in receptive mode, ‘white’ and ‘black’ complementary and able to combine generatively.

Maxwell sees other symbioses between the human body and poetry. Having considered words as image, he then considers them as sounds and the feelings these induce in the body, in his chapters, ‘Pulse’ and ‘Chime.’ In his discussion of rhythm and metre, he explores the symbiotic relationship between formal rhyme schemes and how these affect a sensitive delivery of the poem when read aloud. The metrical beats he likens analogously to the bar lines of musical notation, constituting a ‘silent skeletal frame.’<sup>529</sup> While verse can be written as a strict, formal pattern of beats, it cannot be declaimed with the exact regularity of a metronome without damaging the effect of the poem. Read aloud sensitively, the beats are ‘as likely to fall through silence as upon sound.’ This is not a novel insight of Maxwell’s. He is describing the common practice of, for example, actors, who adjust their readings so as to accommodate the regular rhythms of poetry while allowing these rhythms to function in the background; a symbiosis

---

<sup>528</sup> Maxwell, 11.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 88.

between the regularised cadences of the synthetic scheme and those of daily speech, which can be thought of as the organic scheme.

### 5.6.2 *Temporariness*

The human placenta acts as the fetal ‘renal, respiratory, hepatic, gastrointestinal, endocrine, and immune systems.’<sup>530</sup> The unit *mother and child* is, for the duration of gestation, a maternal-fetal-placental one. The placenta grows and differentiates extremely rapidly throughout its short lifespan, effectively *dying* upon delivery.<sup>531</sup> Uniquely among human organs, the placenta is designed to be temporary. For all its temporariness, its task completed upon delivery, it is increasingly seen to be an important indicator of long-term maternal and fetal health.<sup>532</sup> Its dysfunction is implicated in diverse chronic diseases and it is attracting considerable research attention.

The placenta can be read as metonymic of Christ. As with the biological placenta, Christ offers Himself as nourishment for the developing person, acting as the communicative interface between person and world, and person and the Father. The analogy can be developed further with the *in utero* person as metonymic of the whole human race.<sup>533</sup> Once the child-person is sufficiently mature to survive *ex utero*, the placenta-Christ detaches. This reading harmonises with the scriptural attestation of Christ’s departure from the world in the Ascension where, placenta-like, He detaches-ascends, no longer visible to sight and no longer present in the world in the same way (cf. Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:9-11). The child-world is not left to starve. It continues to be fed by Christ but now in a veiled way via the Eucharistic species of bread and wine.<sup>534</sup> Within

---

<sup>530</sup> A. E. Guttmacher, Y. T. Maddox, and C. Y. Spong, "The Human Placenta Project: Placental Structure, Development, and Function in Real Time," *Placenta* 35, no. 5 (2014).

<sup>531</sup> J. L. James et al., "Can We Fix It? Evaluating the Potential of Placental Stem Cells for the Treatment of Pregnancy Disorders," *ibid.*, no. 2.

<sup>532</sup> D. M. Nelson, "Does a Picture of the Human Placenta Predict the Future?," *ibid.* 31, no. 11 (2010).

<sup>533</sup> ‘Christ the placenta / self-addressed-stamped / envelops the world / embryo’ from ‘Canto for a Summer Sunday in Ordinary Time,’ in David Arthur Bickimer, *Christ the Placenta: Letters to My Mentor on Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1983), 15.

<sup>534</sup> This analogous talk of Christ’s *temporariness* is not to gainsay the thrust of the Resurrection-Ascension testimonies, which affirm the permanence of Christ’s earthly body, now relocated to the heavenly sphere. The mode of Christ’s presence has changed from the straightforwardly fleshly to the

this analogy, the loss of the placenta (Ascension of Christ) constitutes a first weaning. In this loss, though, is gain. The organs of the fetal body realise themselves upon delivery when they are in the world for which they were intended, developing through being exercised. Analogously, the believer's faith (an *inner eye*) is developed when Christ's earthly flesh is no longer present (cf. John 20:29, Jesus' dialogue with Thomas whose faith in the risen Jesus relied upon his seeing with his eyes and feeling with his hands). The placenta is ordered towards growing the fetus so that extra-uterine life is possible; the placental-Christ so that *post mortem* life is possible. The peeling-away of the post-partum placenta metonymically images all human persons who also, at death, detach from earthly life. Death as the peeling-away of the fleshly body is anticipated in a progressive series of sloughings-off,<sup>535</sup> visibly signed in the morphology of the aging body.

### 5.6.3 *Remainder*

*Flesh* constitutes the remainder of earthly life as witnessed by the carnal body's being left behind at death, evacuated of life. The mystery of this state of affairs is that the body, which has lived as a unity of flesh and spirit, experiences a cleavage at death. This crisis presses against any certainty as to how human identity is constituted, let alone in what mode a person may be deemed to exist *post mortem*. There are biblical attestations of some persons exceptionally bypassing the norm of disincarnation: Elijah who 'ascended in a whirlwind into heaven' (2 Kings 2:11) and Jesus' post-resurrection Ascension. Additionally, Mary's Assumption into heaven has been attested to in the early church, although not uniformly.<sup>536</sup>

---

ritually confected Eucharistic signs. David Jones helpfully calls the Last Supper 'abstract,' rather than 'representational' art. See Jones, 170.

<sup>535</sup> R.S. Thomas uses this term in his poem, "Dialectic," from the collection, *Frequencies* (1978). Thomas' perspective on the placenta is darker than the reading above. The poem deals with the silence of God who imparts His truth into persons which is then 'sloughed off like some afterbirth of the spirit.' See Davis, 91.

<sup>536</sup> St. Epiphanius (c. AD 315-403) was non-committal in his writing on the subject, entertaining several possibilities about how Mary's life ended. He does suggest she be the woman referred to in Revelation 12:14 'carried off.' See the entries: Assumption of Our Lady; Death of Mary, in O'Carroll. The Assumption of Mary was declared a dogma of the church by Pius XII on November 1st, 1950 in the Apostolic Constitution, *Munificentissimus Deus*.

The human body is treated with dignity and seriousness in the Hebraic-Christian scriptures.<sup>537</sup> There is a dual sense of its being inherently sacred and having the potential to become so. The Hebrew scriptures disallow heathen mourning practices that cut or tattoo the body (Lev. 19:28). Leviticus chapter twenty gives an extensive list of proscribed sexual practices which Paul draws upon in his letter to the Corinthians exhorting them to practise sexual chastity (1 Cor. 6:13-18). Paul's reasoning is that the body of the believer is a member of Christ (cf. 'a temple of the Holy Spirit within you' [1 Cor. 6:19]) and that as sexual union unites sexual partners as 'one flesh,' to have multiple or illicit sexual partners is to dishonour Christ. His argument distinguishes sins 'outside the body' from those 'against the body itself,' implying the latter's more damaging and more serious adverse effect. Paul's maximal assessment of the body and its especial status, sits in tension with the body's disintegration upon death when it becomes a problem to be disposed of.

John Paul II fleshes out the implications of the Pauline Corinthian epistle. The voluntary actions of the body are the actions of the person and, owing to a person's free will, indicate the internal characteristics of that person. The consequence of the first sin was the instability of the male-female union which John Paul identifies as being a cleavage in the personal subject. God indicates in Genesis 3:16 that the original, good desire for personal union will still operate but in compromised fashion as such desires will be directed 'toward the appeasement of the body, often at the cost of an authentic and full communion of persons' (TOB 31:3). The relationship changes from one of '*communion of persons*' to '*a relationship of possession*' (TOB 31:3). Sin results in a distortion of the spousal meaning of the body, where 'spousal meaning' is widely defined to include, but not be restricted to, sexual relations. It includes 'the full consciousness of the human

---

<sup>537</sup> Respect for mortal remains persists within contemporary secular culture, even though it may be inconsistently applied. Follow-up reportage by the BBC of a Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme registered the political fall-out from the allegation that ten NHS trusts had been involved in the incineration of fetal remains with other clinical waste at their hospitals. Some incinerated fetuses had been intentionally aborted. The method of disposal elicited widespread criticism and calls for the practice to end. While the reportage did not focus upon terminology, the different associations of *incinerate*, and *cremate*, registered differing moral attitudes. At stake is the dignity of the human person which extends to fitting disposal of carnal remains which is satisfied with the respectful social ritual of cremation; not with incineration. See "Warning over burning aborted fetuses," BBC News, 24 March 2014, accessed 2 July 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-26716924>.

being' and 'every effective experience of the body in its masculinity and femininity.' Personal freedom to make of oneself a gift for another is now imbalanced and deformed (TOB 31:6; 32:4-6). To speak realistically of humans post-Fall is to take account of this deformity as Jesus indicates in the Fourth Gospel when He expresses sensible mistrust of those who form a shallow commitment to Him because of the signs they see Him perform (cf. John 2:24-25; TOB 34:3).

The scriptural and papal explications above shed light upon why it is that in a few cases of exceptionally holy persons, their bodies are not left as a troublesome remainder upon earth. The assumption (or, in Jesus' case, Ascension) of these persons confirms their holiness. To be holy is to live a life consistently oriented towards God; a life of full integrity, meaning no cleavage between the person's inner life (*heart*) and actions. Such holiness of life, so infusing the person, can mean upon death the supernatural preservation of their bodily remains. The theological rationale for mortal flesh not decomposing is expressed in the Pauline epistle to the Colossians: that in Christ 'the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Col. 2:9). Deity dwells in Jesus and those who dwell in Him can share in His fullness of personal holiness. Such persons – saints - have so lived their lives that they are not just *things* (phenomena) in the world, they are *signs* that point beyond themselves to God by virtue of the *shape* of their biography.

Jesus' Ascension into Heaven means His body is not remaindered on earth. It becomes available for those living on earth via His sent Spirit and Eucharistic Presence. The placental-Christic body, temporarily *discarded* in the tomb does not remain there, as Christ is more than a 'temporary theophany,'<sup>538</sup> no longer needed. Jesus' Ascension, as with a placental delivery, completes the process of birth. The Ascension as completion of the Resurrection is implicit in the words of the Johannine Jesus: 'No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven [...] (John 3:13)' who then says in the first post-Resurrection appearance, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17).'

---

<sup>538</sup> Resurrected and ascended, Christ's flesh is eternally with the Father: 'The incarnation is not mere expediency.' Hart, 76.

### 5.6.4 Interface

The placenta is the organ of interface, instantiating *between-ness*. It is inside the mother's body and outside her own organ systems which sustain her life. The mother's pregnant body, one of whose functions is to protect the fetal environment from pathogens, is an analogous correlate to the Pauline talk of the body of believers as being a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul explains that sexual relations with prostitutes are analogous to profanation of the temple. The body within the Pauline temple metaphor acts as 'in some sense, a barrier that separates the realm of purity inside from the evil cosmos outside.'<sup>539</sup>

The maternal resonance in the remainder of that verse is strong; talk of the Holy Spirit being 'within you,' and that 'which you have from God,' ending by saying, 'you are not your own.'<sup>540</sup> The maternal association also calls forth the concept of temporariness, (occupation in the uterine environment formative but limited in duration), which harmonises with another Pauline metaphor of the body as 'the earthly tent we live in' (2 Cor. 5:1). Paul in this verse contrasts the body of flesh with, seemingly, a posthumous spiritual body: 'a building from God, a house not made with hands.' Nijay Gupta points out that the physical body is also not made by human hands, in contrast with that of idols, and it is this that makes Paul's temple analogy in 1 Corinthians apposite.<sup>541</sup>

While the Corinthian epistles can tend to suggest physical bodies are 'dispensable visual aids,'<sup>542</sup> scriptural references to a general eschatological resurrection, anticipated in Jesus' resurrection, suggest otherwise. The body's status is more mysterious; *mystery* understood here as not only that which is closed-off to knowledge but as that which discloses and shows forth something.<sup>543</sup> Such mystery is manifest in the physical remains of saints which Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians understand as active interfaces between

---

<sup>539</sup> Gupta, 527.

<sup>540</sup> John Paul II's papal motto, *Totus tuus*, referred to his dedication to the Immaculate Heart.

<sup>541</sup> Gupta, 531.

<sup>542</sup> Hart, 58.

<sup>543</sup> David Jones, "The Preface to 'the Anathemata'," in *Epoch and Artist*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 129.



heaven and earth. Sergius Bulgakov has written from a Russian Orthodox perspective about how saints' relics are believed to function, using several metaphors to do so. Firstly, he argues that having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, they have undergone a substantive change, in a way analogous to the Eucharistic signs. While continuing to be ordinarily visible to the eye, they now constitute 'an appearance, an opaque veil,' the new reality there present being 'incorruptible holy flesh.'<sup>544</sup>

The call to sanctity (that is, to be someone holy and set apart for God) is universal, saints being those whom the church confirms have actualised it. Bulgakov uses a maternal image to illustrate saintliness: 'man stops being man by making of himself a place for God; but thereby he becomes truly man.'<sup>545</sup> A consequence of the first sin was destabilisation of the intimate relationship between flesh and spirit so that in death, spirit is disincarnated and flesh reverts to matter. Owing to the freedom given to every person, each one can realise an increasingly strong connection between flesh and spirit, depending on life choices. Saints are those who have lived as a strongly realised flesh-spirit unity. When they die, even though their bodies may have suffered restrictions in function owing to illness or natural degeneration, they serve as confirmation of that to which Sarah Coakley draws attention in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-c.395AD), that 'change does not necessarily signal decay' but can be a mark of ongoing transformation, of the type to which Paul refers in 2 Cor. 3:18.<sup>546</sup>

Bulgakov argues that the real consequence of each human life is that the person radically participates in the creation of his or her resurrection body. Although saints die, their life choices have so internalised God's grace that they are 'in a special, transfigured state of spiritual body.'<sup>547</sup> A saint acts as an interface between heaven and earth, abiding in both spheres.

---

<sup>544</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Relics and Miracles*, trans. B. Jakin (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 17.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 19. Elizabeth A. Johnson summarises the Kabbalistic doctrine of creation as being possible owing to God's free self-limitation. God contracts and so space is available for the world. The world is that which is brought forth from God while remaining *in* God. Johnson notes critically the use by several theologians of this maternal trope, invoking 'quintessentially a female experience,' who nevertheless persist in using male imagery of God. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 233-4.

<sup>546</sup> Coakley, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God," 68.

<sup>547</sup> Bulgakov, 29.

Saintly earthly remains are ‘living remains.’<sup>548</sup> These may appear to be only the ‘dry bones’ of Ezekiel (themselves placental in their status as remainder), or, less often, as incorrupt flesh. According to a metaphoric scheme of the obstetric body, saints’ relics are placental in being remainders although these continue to act as interfaces between two environments, providing sustenance for those who come to them in faith.<sup>549</sup> To use the image of John Paul II, saintly remains indicate the nuptial bonding between the saint and God; the consummate expression of which is that between Mary and her son.

Mary occupies a unique place in the panoply of saints: she is the mother of the Son, the first to be re-born of the Spirit at the Johannine Crucifixion scene, and the fully-realised disciple who, no longer a pilgrim,<sup>550</sup> has reached the *telos* of her journey of faith, expressed in the church’s confirmatory dogma of her assumption into heaven, by virtue of which her earthly remains are not accessible as relics. Mary is the token and first-fruit of the transformation of the world brought about through the life-death-resurrection of her son. The new and the old now co-exist, expressed by Mary T. Prokes as, ‘a nuptial bonding between the already glorified and what remains in present dimensions of earth [...] there is an indissolubility between what is and what is to come.’<sup>551</sup> Mary’s body, now no longer limited as in its earthly form, resembles in some way that of her resurrected son’s. She, as He, is no longer subject to the restraints of time and space so is able to be present both in heaven and on earth. She, as He, is now able to be sent by the Father. Mary as the one sent has manifested to certain persons in specific locations. These visitations of the Virgin are highly contentious, mimetically acting out the dividing ‘sword’ of her son’s

---

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>549</sup> The existence of saintly relics and of saintly incorrupt bodies steers a course between two differing ways of understanding the body. One, indebted to Plato, sees the body as that existent behind which, or within which, veiled, is its meaning. This corresponds with the literary critical method of structuralism, which sees textual meaning *hidden* behind the text. The other, influenced by Aquinas, sees the body’s material existence not as veil interposed between the body and its truth, but that as which the subject lives. Critical attention is turned to the fabric of this *veil* rather than to something additional to it. The literary critical correspondence is with the methodology of post-structuralism. Cf. Barthes, 39. The exceptionalism of the incorrupt saintly body draws attention to itself for the purpose of pointing, Marian-like, to Christ whose on-going life infused the saint’s; immanence and transcendence co-present in the body-sign.

<sup>550</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 5.

<sup>551</sup> Mary Timothy Prokes, "The Nuptial Meaning of the Body in Light of Mary's Assumption," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 11, no. 2 (1984): 168-9.

presence. Marian apparitions or visitations tend to polarise opinion as to their veracity. The official Roman Catholic Church position is to treat purported visions as private revelations, to be investigated, if warranted, thereby conveniently distancing the magisterium.<sup>552</sup>

The phenomenon of Marian apparitions lays open some attitudes of the church hierarchy towards the laity and the body. The phenomenon is nearly always laity-lead and the visionaries are overwhelmingly women.<sup>553</sup> Michael O'Carroll notes the exegetical circle operative between clergy and laity regarding apparitions: laity instructed not to accept any apparition prior to church approval; church basing its decision on whether an alleged apparition warrants investigation upon the level of interest and belief displayed by the laity.<sup>554</sup> Furthermore, of the three types of visions listed by Richard Rutt: 'corporeal,' where a person is objectively seen; 'imaginative,' where the person appears in the mind of the witness; and 'spiritual,' where there is no image involved, the church esteems the latter most highly, 'corporeal' least so.<sup>555</sup> As the phenomenon of Marian apparitions is largely female laity-lead, and the church hierarchy is exclusively male, the alignment of preference for a disincarnated mediation with gender stereotypes where materiality is associated with the female and rationality with the male (the latter esteemed more highly) suggests a persistence in the marginalising of the feminine by imputing lesser importance to the dominant mode of Marian 'interventions.'<sup>556</sup> This sits in tension, seemingly unacknowledged by the hierarchy, with the biblical instances of the faithful being favoured with physically seeing God's blessing, notably Moses seeing the retreating glory of the Lord (Ex.33:18-23) and the Promised Land (Num. 27:12), and Simeon seeing Christ, the promise of Israel (Lk. 2:25), not to mention the resurrection appearances where the corporeality of Christ's presence is explicitly attested to (cf. Lk. 24:42; John 20:27).

---

<sup>552</sup> Richard Rutt, "Why Should He Send His Mother? Some Theological Reflections on Marian Apparitions," in *Mary Is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumensim*, ed. William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster: Gracewing, 1997), 274.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Michael O'Carroll, "Apparitions of Our Lady," in *Mary Is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, ed. William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster: Gracewing, 1997), 288.

<sup>555</sup> Rutt, 277.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid. Used by Rutt as a collective term to include locutions, visions, and apparitions.

The locations of Marian apparitions conform to what Celtic spirituality calls *thin* places, where the separation between this world and the spiritual realm is palpably lessened. They are places of liminality or of more clearly perceived interface. These *loci* function in the same way as saints' relics although in expanded and amplified fashion, prompting apprehension of spiritual presence through specific embodiments. They attest to life lived more fully aware of God's active Presence within the period now occupied, the *metaxis*, between Christ's Ascension and His Second Coming. The world's *now* is that of *in-betweenness*; the trope of the placental Christ answered by the trope of the placental world.

Direct experience of Marian apparition sites is frequently reported as being transformative or *marking* in some way. In this is another connection with the placental motif. The umbilicus attaching placenta and neonate is clamped and cut, finally detaching, but the site of its connection is a permanent mark upon the body. The mother who bore that child is permanently and silently registered within that child's body, its presence speaking of one's body being both one's own and yet more than one's own. Its presence marks each human body as having begun within the mother, anchored to her. It is the visible mark in the flesh of the m/other who m/othered me. Its presence memorialises the placenta, thereby rejecting strict utilitarianism even of that temporary organ. Concerning the body, *remainder* is not synonymous with *refuse*. Perhaps today, one of the most garrulous attestations of the umbilical and placental connection to the mystery of the body and its divine Originator is that of burgeoning placental and umbilicus stem cell research, carried out in the hope of renewal, regeneration and restitution of imperfect bodies.

## Chapter 6 Mary's maternal body as poem of the Father, for Christ

all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life [...] they are to make of it a work of art <sup>557</sup>

The first part of this thesis title says that the body of Mary is *for* the body of Christ. *For* belongs to the lexical category of preposition which functions to express a relation between two things. What, then, is the relation between the two bodies of Mary and of Christ? It is a relation of Marian support of, and acting for the benefit of, Christ's body. This inclination or purposive direction is acted upon by Mary in her on-going life, as evidenced by scripture. The relation is present in her decision to co-operate in the realisation of Christ's incarnation, in her bringing Christ to birth, in her nurturing of Him to adulthood, in her support of his project of realising the 'Kingdom' of God on earth, in her presence at her son's death. This Marian support extends to Christ's transformed body, when it becomes, in David Jones' term, 'abstract art,' at the institution of the Eucharist. This transformed body is now localised in focal points wherever the consecrated Eucharistic species is present, and is also present in the community of His followers, now referred to by the metaphor, 'body of Christ.'

Christ's body is the reason and cause for this relation between Christ and Mary. This is so in a macro sense, as all persons are gratuitously willed into being by God who desires them, from the excess of his love; the Second Person of the Trinity being the one in whom and by whom all things were made. It is true, too, in each particular instance; each person existing for a specific, God-ordained purpose, which is to participate in the on-going work of salvation. In the case of Mary, her reason and purpose is to be mother of Christ's body. This relation does not imply necessity or utilitarianism. *Reason* is here a reciprocal relation where Mary recognises her purpose is in God and God's reason for His incarnated presence is man (in which category is Mary).

---

<sup>557</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Artists," (1999), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html). §2.

Christ's body, towards which she is oriented, and whose interests she serves, is also her eschatological end; the destination she desires. In this she expresses the common desire of man. Mary, though, has already realised her *telos* which the dogma of the Assumption seeks to express. This dogma affirms that she has realised authentic personhood. Mary's body is also *for* Christ's in the sense of being its representative. Whenever Mary is present, or invoked, she directs persons to her son. She also represents Him in a stronger sense. If the logic of the relational metaphors of 'spouse' and 'mother' is followed through, then Mary is ontologically altered. By virtue of being united with the Holy Spirit, Mary's body is one with God. This real unity is realised and signed in the flesh of the incarnated Christ, whose materiality came from Mary. The sign of the incarnated Christ in the Eucharistic body is a sign, too, that refers to the maternal body of His mother who continues to offer herself up for Him.

### 6.1 Body as an integral part of thinking

John Paul's central metaphor in his *Theology of the Body* was that of the body's *language*. While metaphors are linguistic usages, they also provide the frames within which thinking happens, so structuring not only 'what sort of answers we get, but what kinds of questions we ask.'<sup>558</sup> Metaphor is not just a way of describing the world but a way by which we make sense of it. This way of making sense is not something only an interior, intellectual process, involving perception and language, but one that results from a fuller relationship between language and body.

Cognitive scientist, B. K. Bergen, has demonstrated how language in any mode, literal or metaphorical, engages perceptual simulations in the body.<sup>559</sup> This 'embodied simulation' is a form of knowing wherein 'language about actions engages the parts of the brain responsible for performing those same actions.'<sup>560</sup> Even grammatical structure contributes its own meaning to such mental simulations.<sup>561</sup> This being so, it significantly bolsters talk of a connection between *language*

---

<sup>558</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 63.

<sup>559</sup> Benjamin K. Bergen, *Louder Than Words : The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 263.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-100.

and *body*, expanding our thought about the range and type of bodily participation in speech. It strengthens a sense of the unity of the body if the linguistic domain and the physical domain are seen to be so closely related that *mental* acts or speech acts are more truly thought of as *embodiments*.

If thinking within a metaphoric frame guides perception, then how to account for any metaphor's arising in the first place? So-called primary metaphors, for example, size indicating importance; heat indicating anger; height indicating happiness, indicate their experiential origin, taking us back to the body.<sup>562</sup> These are metaphors with their roots in physiologic experience – the heightened blood-flow of anger, the sense of walking tall when happy. These metaphors suggest that the experience of living in the world leads persons to think metaphorically. The origin of metaphor may be not primarily about how we perceive the world so much as how we perceive ourselves within the world.

This position informs the thinking of Elizabeth Sewell. In her book, *The Human Metaphor*,<sup>563</sup> Sewell makes a maximal claim for metaphor that it does not just admit the phenomenal world as a way of thinking,<sup>564</sup> but constitutes the structure of thought; that because we think metaphorically, language is that way.<sup>565</sup> Metaphor is thus the human '[m]ethod' of relating to the world. It shapes the person who in turn is always part of the cosmic whole that is constantly being made. This is not to suggest, for Sewell, the imposition of mind upon matter but instead to follow such thinkers as Teilhard de Chardin, who postulated an *inwardness* to matter, as human consciousness arose from it.

Sewell was influenced by Michael Polanyi's hypothesis concerning the relation between thinking and the body. Polanyi's observations and analyses of the performance of skills by highly competent practitioners led him to conclude that such was their mastery, the skills they were exercising in the performance of the task had receded into the cognitive background where they

---

<sup>562</sup> James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), 24.

<sup>563</sup> Sewell. Sewell's title is a borrowing from Novalis [pseud.] by way of Dylan Thomas. See 40.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

behaved as tacit knowledge (cf. 2.3.3 (b), above).<sup>566</sup> This subconscious engagement of assimilated skills, he hypothesised, may also apply to the intellectual life, hence *body* may legitimately be said to be an integral part of thinking. Sewell found that postulate compelling, citing in support the sense some writers have expressed of not being fully conscious of what they are doing in the process of composition; of being guided, and finding the final result ‘amazing’ for its ‘congruence and foresight.’<sup>567</sup>

Physiology’s relation to thought processes and language where words trigger simulations in the mind, and where the mind can have so integrated physical skills as to not have to consciously attend to their exercise, says much about how we negotiate the world and gives us insights into how we experience it. It does not, though, disclose how it is that one person’s life becomes biographically shaped in a particular way. It has been the premise of this thesis that all of nature functions as a sign of its creator; the human being a privileged type of sign (*image*).<sup>568</sup> The nature and purpose of an image is to be recognizably similar to, although not identical with, its original. The similarity between sign and signified should present no impediment to others recognising it; it should be ‘transparent.’<sup>569</sup> The person is a sign in his total personhood, but that sign can be parsed so that each constituent of the person is also a *signum*, so, human thoughts and words. The summation of a person’s life, their biography, is the representative sign by which their sign-status is adjudicated for its level of transparency to its original. The definitive personal biography has already been lived, according to Christian belief, by Jesus; Jesus, that is, is fully *sign*. Nothing in his life fails to signify the Father. His life, offered to, accepted and confirmed by the Father is the template for every human life; living in conformity with that life, the realisation of authentic personhood.

Within this comprehensive natural sign-system, where the person is the privileged sign, there are also linguistic signs with privileged status. Two with which this thesis has been

---

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>568</sup> Augustine’s ‘*De Doctrina*’ claimed that not all things were signs but implied that all things are potential signs. See Susannah Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs*, Studies in Systematic Theology (Leiden [Netherlands]: Brill, 2013), 141.

<sup>569</sup> Carpenter, 112. Carpenter here is referring to Balthasar’s insight.



concerned are poems and metaphors. If a metaphor is the term we give to indicate a linguistic expression which is not only the outcome of *a priori* perception and thought, but the *a priori* structure of thinking (Sewell's 'method' by which we relate to the world), then metaphor is privileged in two senses, being the somatically-generated ground of personal relations with the world, and the foundational way of expressing those relations. A human life has the multivalences and profusion of meaning that is achieved linguistically with metaphor, one of those linguistic forms that Rowan Williams attributes to the 'pressure' of some phenomena; his metaphoric frame implying its eruptive potential, with all that that metaphor implies.

## 6.2. The body as poetic sign

Although he does not explicitly use the terms *poem* or *poetry* in his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul bases his whole anthropology upon the premise that the human body is not only meaningful but poetic. Persons are saturated with signs, inhabiting as they do, a symbolic cosmos. The body is part of this semiotic context, intended to be comprehended, and, as sign, to be disclosive and interpretable. While knowledge of the body is accessible to the natural sciences, the type of knowledge the body mediates (giftedness, relationality, mutuality, openness) exceeds what those disciplines can disclose. The body's form and content, structure and meaning are a seamless whole; *poem*, with its own inviolable, irreducible integrity. Not only can the body be known via the metaphor, *poem*, the body originates and mediates literary poems, forms of linguistic embodiment. The embodied person, a poetic sign, is the summit both of the uniquely human sign-system, and of creation which signifies the creator<sup>570</sup>; generating, receiving, interpreting and delivering meaning. The structure of human-world encounters inscribes a feed-back loop: the more fully the body is known, the more the body's ultimate Source is known; the more that Source is known, the more the body knows him/herself.

---

<sup>570</sup> Talk of the natural world, or human language, *signifying* God is analogical. See Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs*, 135.

A poem, though, can be distinguished from poetry. It is the hope of a poet, I have suggested, to construct poems that manifest poetry. Writing, in this sense, is as an act of faith which, of its nature, is risky. *Poetry* is here understood to be an abstract quality mediated a by a poem, through which it may be accessed. Poet and critic, Clive James, also distinguishes the two, though reversing the usage of the terms, as given here. James speaks approvingly of a poem as that which is ‘the separable, stand-alone thing.’<sup>571</sup> It is each particular poem that matters, for James, not the abstract generality, *poetry*.<sup>572</sup> *Poetry* is a term for some quality known through being perceived or experienced, yet elusive of definition. A general definition would be: that transformed and potentially transforming quality of a poem that persists with its reader, not letting go. It may be instantly identifiable (the *yes!* moment) or may seep slowly into a life, gradually saturating it. It can be recognised, perhaps inchoately, as manifesting truth by recipients who, in Ricoeur’s term, ‘stand before’ the poem, in an attitude of receptive openness. The relation between poem and poetry can be well represented by either the spousal metaphor (each as ‘gift’ to the other in an exclusive and particular way) or, better, the maternal (poetry dwelling within the poem; the relationship between them irrevocable). The distinction in terminology allows us to distinguish between a body as a poem but to allow that any particular somatic poem may be suffused with a greater or lesser degree of poetry.

### 6.3 The poetics of the maternal body

John Paul’s theological anthropology devotes much of its analytic attention to what may be called the *other-centredness* (‘giftedness’) of the person; a foundational characteristic. This structural openness and outward orientation proceeds from the other-centredness of God. Being constituted relationally is one of the indelible markers of being human, signed in each person’s entering the world through the body of his/her mother. The spousal relation expresses in a unique way the inclination towards others; the desire to give and receive love without reserve. The spousal relationship is established by intention which is acted upon in word and deed. The covenantal words

---

<sup>571</sup> James, 38.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

of marriage effect the bond which is then sealed with the act of spousal coitus. That consummation effects substantive change, the real unity of the two, expressed in Genesis as the two becoming 'one flesh.' The claim is for ontological change (a *two* now a *one*) yet the two subjects persist as two subjects. Contradiction is not intended, yet the expression challenges how to construe its meaning. This is extremity of language communicating extremity of personal relation.

Rowan Williams includes within his category of 'extreme' language such constructions as metaphor, paradox, irony, saying they function 'by pushing habitual or conventional speech out of shape'<sup>573</sup> so as to enlarge our understanding not only of their referent, but of how language can speak truthfully of a thing.<sup>574</sup> Williams' image strongly connotes the gestational body. Conjoining Williams' image with John Paul's terms: the 'extreme' language of the two-in-one spousal body becomes physically signed in any resultant pregnancy in two ways: the maternal body becomes a morphing extreme of body-text that rewrites the conventional speech of the non-pregnant body, and the child is a concrete manifestation, an outward and visible sign and confirmation of the spouses' invisible but real unity.<sup>575</sup> The meaningful biology of gestation and birth deepens and reconstitutes relational possibility, superseding the oppositional *you* versus *me*, and transcending the amicable *you and me*, transforming it into the relational apex, *you in me*. This is encoded in the genomic patterning where the child receives half its DNA from its mother, half from its father; *two yours in me*. The escalating triad of one-within-another progresses from the transience of each act of spousal coitus, to the more indelible, although also temporary, gestational presence, to the permanent fusion of twoness in a related but different third; the child. Belonging together, expressed gestationally in the strongest possible spatial terms, applies not only to the child but to the mother. The child becomes the encompassing form of the mother's life, the context in which she lives. Mother and child figure and refigure each other's identities.

---

<sup>573</sup> Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*, 150.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>575</sup> Cf. TOB 22:3: 'they give rise to another being similar to themselves, about which they can say together, "It is flesh from my flesh and bone from my bones".'

In its changing shapes, the obstetric body constitutes a communicative sign-system, or language, and is an analogical signifier of the dynamism of spoken language, changing as it adapts itself to new needs. Meanings disclose themselves in the somatic adaptations as the maternal processes body forth. The creative re-figuration of the obstetric body is a type of carnal *poiesis*; the unfolding processes a type of performance art.

### ***6.3.1 The maternal nature of poetic discourse***

Gestational language, or the *poem* of the obstetric body, seems to have inspired Paul Ricoeur's reflective analysis of the revelatory function of poetic discourse (which he does not limit to the literary poetic genre).<sup>576</sup> Ricoeur sees a correlation between the 'suspension' of the descriptive function of discourse and the revelatory function. His reasoning is that descriptive veracity is measurable according to its degree of adequation; that is, how close the description is to the real object to which it refers. Any description is liable to empirical verification. Ricoeur, though, sees the value in poetic discourse in its not opposing text and object, following the structure of 'objects opposed to a subject,' in the manner of description.<sup>577</sup> Rather, he sees poetic language as preceding that capacity, restoring the reader to a state of 'participation-in' or 'belonging-to' an order of things. Ricoeur's scheme has a deeply maternal structure which draws upon the earliest life experiences of each personal subject, initially enclosed within another, followed by a protracted *post-partum* dependent attachment to another. Consciousness of oneself as a centre of autonomous will, which can be opposed to other autonomous centres, develops later. The poetic function for Ricoeur is analogous to the maternal function as, in both instances, truth is revealed not via oppositional self-consciousness, nor logical thought-patterns, but as a place of manifestation. Benignly confronting that text, or *locus*, can make possible self-understanding.<sup>578</sup> The response invited is not 'obedience' to the text's vision, but an appeal to the imagination which recognises the text 'as a Poem.'<sup>579</sup>

---

<sup>576</sup> Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics."

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

The maternal gestating body is intended to affirm and expand the reciprocally-expressed language of the couple, 'gift of self in love for the other.' Pregnancy once initiated progresses according to a series of mechanical somatic responses to changing chemical signals, sequentially refashioning the mother's body independent of her will. Those actions the gestating body performs reiterate the spousal language of love: orientation towards the good of another in total acceptance of that (gestationally unknown) other. This is signed in the expansive uterine accommodation, increased cervical tensile strength, and the exceptional generation of a single-use organ.

A literary poem is also that which exists *for* others. How it is related to by its auditors or readers varies according to whether its mediation is oral or written. Literary poems which exist in written form have, as Paul Ricoeur has noted, a universalised potential audience. The cost of this expanded readership is the loss of public communal recitations which had shared the function of religion in binding a community together. The act of reading, on the other hand, is private, individualised, and interiorised. Paradoxically, written text which is most closely linked to materiality in being legibly recorded, becomes spiritualised in being 'liberated from the narrowness of the face-to-face situation' of oral performance.<sup>580</sup> Writing becomes a means by which a Cartesian split is effected between bodies and minds. Once poem is bound as book, it unbinds the community from whom, and for whom, the poem was devised.<sup>581</sup>

If it is granted that poems have an internal pressure towards oral expression, with the fluidity, flexibility and communal participation that allows, this may intimate poetry's particular affinity with the body, and its social dimension. A poem publicly recited participates in the real historicity of embodied life which is spoken and spent. The poem's transient participation in the

---

<sup>580</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Speaking and Writing," in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: TCU Press, 1976), 31.

<sup>581</sup> Muir, "The Natural Estate," 11. Most of the ballads of Muir's Orkney Islands ceased to live in the community once they were written down and the organic, imaginative inheritance slid into decline. Prior to their formal recording, they had been orally redacted over centuries; the fruit of generations of participants. Once written, one version became the standard and the its communal currency deflated with fixation. *Ibid.*, 15.

elusive present is poignant with associations of life's inexorable progression towards death. It paradoxically evokes the pre-verbal state as words become breath, the very mark of our living. A communal recitation assembles a body of auditors around an orator who not only mediates the poem but who becomes the 'site of encounter.'<sup>582</sup> The relationship is stronger than mediation, as the orator's body becomes 'the material in which a work is realised.'<sup>583</sup> A poetic declamation is an ontological statement making concrete and experiential what a poem is: a body-of-words which proceeds from matter-which-speaks.

The two outstanding biblical motifs associated with the Word of God integrate the two modes of formal linguistic mediation. This is expressed in the line from Les Murray's poem that forms the epigraph to chapter one of this thesis. God's expressive word, as encountered in the world, is the meeting-point where durable permanence (law) meets labile motility (body of Christ). If it is allowed that formal language, connected with rules, law, and boundary-enforcement, is the domain of the father, and that poems are the linguistic places where this law communes with the pre-verbal maternal of pulses, rhythms and musicality, then Mary is the person where the two meet. Mary's presentation within scripture does not comply with the usual way women are referred to as she is both personally named and given her own direct speech. Her declamation of the Magnificat on the occasion of the Visitation to Elizabeth, (Lk. 1: 39-45), is not only useful for narrative purposes, confirming her as 'Daughter Zion,' it functions as a composite presentation of the language of the father, (multiple quotations from, or allusions to, several books from the formal record of the Hebrew scriptures), and the poetic language domain associated with the mother, (quotations and allusions are to Wisdom literature, hymnody from the psalms, and prophecy). Mary is figured as the symbiosis of culture and nature.

---

<sup>582</sup> Aaron Rosen, *Art & Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 320.

<sup>583</sup> Murray, "Embodiment and Incarnation," 32.

## 6.4 The poetics of Mary's maternal body

The two types of self-donative love with which this thesis is primarily concerned: that of the maternal, gestational body, and that of the linguistic gift of a poem, offer two interpretive introits to the Annunciation.

### 6.4.1 *Annunciation: speaking life*

The merits of Mary's *fiat* are attributable to her having acted according to her personal freedom. Her *yes* is both the summit of her lived human experience, and the product of it. Mary is able to consent as she has already internalised and lived the words of God. This internalisation, expressed in the way she lived, is a moral virtue as it resulted from her free choice to co-operate with grace. So, although her motherhood in the temporal order preceded her discipleship of her son, her discipleship of God had gone before, creating the ground of her assent; she is already formed as a *yes* to God before she is asked to formally and specifically articulate that *yes* at the Annunciation. John Paul's early philosophical work offers another depth of understanding to the significance of the Marian *fiat*.

In *The Acting Person*, the-then Karol Wojtyła wrote that an authentically human act is one where the person not only acts but reflexively recognises him/herself as the cause of that act. The personal subject is an actor who enacts and has self-awareness of being that actor enacting. There is a distinction, therefore, which Wojtyła makes, between such self-aware acts and events that merely 'happen' to a person. A personal act has two objects: the intended object of the will, and the subject's own ego (*ego* here as both subject and object of a person's action). As Deborah Savage explicates, this means that every human action is not reducible to a matter of volition or intentionality because 'it will always include an element of self-determination, an act of the person.'<sup>584</sup> Actions are not only, that is, the externalisation of will but shape the person who has chosen so to act; the acting person aware of this constitutive connection between his/her acts and his/her personhood. Mary's *fiat*, seen

---

<sup>584</sup> Deborah Savage, "The Centrality of Lived Experience in Wojtyla's Account of the Person," *Annals of Philosophy* 61, no. 4 (2013): 41.

in this light, is something deeper than agreement informed by faith in the one who asks, as meritorious as that is. Her *yes* was the historic moment of coalescence between divine and human wills where the human is acting not so as to gain, or increase, mastery over a situation or person (*contra* Eve who sought the power of ultimate discrimination, so judgement, for herself), but so as to submit self to God.

Wojtyła schematises constitutive action (which includes thought and speech) in the following way. First, truth is cognized prior to its becoming an object of the will. This order makes rational sense as only that which is known can be recognised<sup>585</sup> and once recognised, become an object of desire. The will is ordered towards the good, so once the good is recognised, it will be desired. Although the good exerts a strong attraction, a person may choose to resist it. Free will persists. Rather, the presence of the good invites a person toward it. A person's acceptance or rejection of the allure of the good determines 'the maturity and the perfection of the person.'<sup>586</sup> Each person determines who she is becoming at each decisive moment when she decides, 'I will.' Wojtyła therefore speaks of decision-making as 'an instance of threshold.'<sup>587</sup> The inclination and movement towards the good and the true involves the person's transcendence of the self in two different directions: horizontally, towards an external object in the world, and vertically, outside the world, whereby the subject transcends her 'own previously constituted boundaries.'<sup>588</sup> The Mary of the Lukan Annunciation is at the threshold of self-transcendence when she questions the angel. In accepting his answer, she accepts that she can transcend, through faith in God, her own borders and limits.

#### 6.4.1 (a) *Virgin: the poetics of self-giving*

This deliberate release of the self is an ever-present possibility for persons. Just as *Eve* and *Adam*, in making the choices they did, are morally and ethically responsible for what subsequently befell them, so, inversely, does Mary's choice redound to her advantage. The

---

<sup>585</sup> Ibid. Savage is referencing Wojtyła, *Acting Person*: 114.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 43. Savage quotes at length from Wojtyła, *Acting Person*: 127.

<sup>587</sup> Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 127.

<sup>588</sup> Savage, 43. Savage references Wojtyła, *Acting Person*: 120.



Annunciation pericope re-personalises free will. It is not an abstraction in the gospel, attributable to human nature, but a property of the personal subject. Wojtyla's personalistic insights – that personal actions continually form and re-form the actor – allow for the sign of Mary's perpetual virginity to be read more expansively than only pointing narrowly to her sexual chastity. Her personal response to God was total. She withheld nothing from the full integrity of her person, body, mind, and spirit. Just as her motherhood anchors unseen reality in concrete, visible flesh, so is a carnal sign of her bodily integrity fitting. This idea of propriety, or *conveniens*, was a term used theologically in the high medieval period by such theologians as Anselm, Aquinas, and Bonaventure, to express a satisfying symbiotic relation between a thing and something with which it fits. The notion avoided the polarities of necessity and of contingency. The term therefore had the quality of a bridging term that expressed a yes-and-no, the co-presence of seeming contradictories a defence against contrastive opposition.<sup>589</sup> Mary's intact hymen signifies fittingly the totality of her gift of self to God; a sign that binds together the virginal and the spousal, so transcending the either/or which those states would usually imply.

The poetics of Mary's virginal *intactus* can be read according to boundary-crossing and boundary-enforcement. Affirming with her act of consent that the person may be taken up into the boundless possibilities of God, Mary transcends the bounds of human possibility, redrawing their contours by becoming *virgin mother*. The conception of her son transcends the boundary of the human *soma*, signing the crossing by preserving Mary's virginity. This sign is structured as a layered treble paradox. The legible sign of Christ's presence inscribes itself invisibly, literally veiling the mystery in flesh, in a metaphoric microcosm of the Incarnation. As a metaphoric reworking of the signage of consummation, it reverses the signage of male dedication to God in circumcision; retention, not removal, signifying Mary's belonging. Thirdly, the sign of Christ's transcendence of the norms of human conception happens at the point of His immanent manifestation within the womb of Mary.

---

<sup>589</sup> Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 38-40.

Read according to John Paul's spousal characteristics of mutuality and reciprocity, the exchange between the divine messenger and Mary respects, yet is unrestricted by, the bounds of Mary's embodiment: temporality and spatial fixity. Those bounds are invited into the boundlessness of God. Spatial constraints and norms are transformed but temporality is not erased. Temporality is invited to donate itself to eternity which is effected by eternity's entering into time. This is the structural conceit that shapes Edwin Muir's 'Annunciation,' and is present in Noel Rowe's 'Magnificat: 1' where the divine eternal waits upon Mary's response, outside her room. The possibility of mutuality within this divine-creaturely exchange is sceptically quizzed in Elizabeth Jennings' poem of the event.

#### 6.4.1 (b) *Spouse: the poetics of knowledge*

Les Murray coined his neologism, 'wholespeak,' to express language that fuses analytic, orderly, and conscious cognition, with the subconscious locutions of dreams and imagination. Mary's brief dialogue with the angelic messenger demonstrates such fullness and balance in her thinking and speaking. She tries to understand rationally, with cognitive consonance, which is insufficient for the situation. She enters into God's alternative vision which she cannot clearly see, nor understand, but trusts. The event continues to live in her mind as she contemplates all that had happened to her. Contemplation is both a form of cognitive processing and the work of a reflective imagination. The fullness of language that she exhibits is layered and complex; 'wholespeak' now appearing to be a form of Marian-speak.

Mary speaks in the manner of an artist, saint or prophet, acting trustingly with that which she knows, breaking new ground in the process. Her *knowing* included the apophatic darkness of incomprehension as well as the radiance of illumination. Rowan Williams has spoken of prayer running ahead of systematic thinking.<sup>590</sup> Mary's *fiat* functions as can prayer: a response from the heart that does not wait for the understanding of the mind.<sup>591</sup> This is not to imply that such committed action

---

<sup>590</sup> Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2007), 63.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid. Williams said of the New Testament writers that they were working out something that had 'long since happened to the heart and imagination.'

as Mary's is precipitate or irrational. What it does show is an alignment of her vision with the revealed vision of God. Under such circumstances, her *fiat* constitutes an imaginative leap of creative faith which is supremely rational. In Mary's *fiat*, as in poetic composition, there is an 'appropriate rigour' to the task,<sup>592</sup> whereby poetic utterances are measured against the truths of lived life and the revelation of God.

#### **6.4.2 *Pieta: Eucharistic sign***

The *Pietà* trope recognizes and honours the particular nature of maternity where the bond formed *in utero* is a unique type of body communion, grounded in, but somatically exceeding, the intimacy of sexual congress. The poetic challenge is to work it into words which do not overwhelm the silence that is its speaking. One way to achieve this restraint is to restrict the length of the poem, as is notably the case with the three *Pietà* poems included in this thesis. Their brevity (ten lines, fourteen lines, twelve lines) is apposite, organically related to the content of the image: the death of the definitive Word. The brevity of the poems speaks to the peak emotional content of the image and to the seeming implosion of words' power to communicate.

The silence associated with the *Pietà* completes a metaphoric circle, taking the viewer back to the beginning of Jesus' life, at the Annunciation. Mary then had heard and listened to the word of the Father; silence being the ground of hearing. This silence after the Deposition is the silence of trauma where words fail. It points to the provisional character of human words which, in their limitations, indicate a *more*, an *other* where language cannot fail. Silence of this type is the excess beyond extreme language and refers human words to God's one complete and final Word; the only word of sufficient plenitude to never be exhausted, depleted, or evacuated by circumstance.

As an imaginative augmentation of scripture and dogma, the *pietà* trope has proven itself resilient and enduring, securely integrated within the Catholic symbolic. As an image, it offers rich poetic valences. It is a dual lament for the irretrievable poems: the silenced Word, and the mother

---

<sup>592</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), xiv.

unmade by the death of her only issue. The drama of the image lies in its spatial integration of mother and child at the point of devastating dis-integration, where what is at stake is not only that particular mother-child bond but, as it is an image of the proto-community, of the possibility for human community as such. Such emotionally intense situations, where words struggle or surrender are those where, in Les Murray's terms, the 'forebrain' is demoted and the 'limbic' promoted. The poetic translation of this emotional pattern and its effect on the body is realised convincingly in James McAuley's *Pietà* poem where words cede to gesture. McAuley's poem is structured around an affecting pun where the maternal tactile action is used to touch the reader who knows that touch evokes the fleeting within the boundaries of the spatio-temporal world.

The *pietà* image represents the hiatus and tension of Holy Saturday. The risk of the whole salvific project waits upon whether Christ's Passion will be received and interpreted as sign, or whether His poetic endeavour will be misconstrued, misunderstood, ignored, or passed over with a literalist reading. Here is object like any other (a corpse) and not like any other (depending upon whose, one believes, is the corpse). If the living Jesus were a sign, as He Himself claimed to be ('He who has seen me has seen the Father'), then how does His death modify the truth of His claim? Is the claim invalidated? How could this dead man be a sign of God? If it is the case that a sign is 'the beginning of a progression, a clue to directed motion,'<sup>593</sup> then is this sign forward-leading or backward-looking? If the body had been authentically attested to in its earthly life as the body of incarnated deity, then how is that body now the sign of God? The deposited Christ-corpse in the arms of His mother is a figure with the highest 'level of indeterminacy.'<sup>594</sup> The *Pietà* is a threshold image, pointing to the course of Jesus' life having seemingly gone disastrously awry. How can such *wrongness* be read aright? How can the valid credulity of faith be kept alive without opposing faith to reason? Is it possible that *corpse* is in some sense still *corpus*?

---

<sup>593</sup> Elizabeth Sewell, "The Reading of Signs, in Thinking and Poetry," in *To Be a True Poem: Essays by Elizabeth Sewell*, ed. William E. Ray (Nth Carolina: Hunter Publishing Co., 1979), 155.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, 162. The phrase is used by Michael Polanyi in speaking of the relation between scientific discovery and prophecy; scientific theory anticipating something which is far beyond either what the theory can as then express, or what the founder can then know.

### 6.4.3 *The purposes of poems*

From the reader's point of view, a poem is neither a necessity nor a contingency. An evocation of *conveniens* seems apt. A poem is read as a free choice, done for its own sake. This act of discretionary freedom manifests some of those characteristics John Paul identified as foundational to the person: mutuality (poem and reader each hoping for the other), reciprocity (each giving and receiving from the other), and generativity (new insights, different ways of seeing, fresh interpretations resulting from their union). A reader's act of reading can enact the spousal vow, 'I take you to be mine'; the reading experience as intense as wanting to inhabit the poem.<sup>595</sup>

If one of the purposes of poems (or of any of the arts) is to suggest change by intimating new possibilities for living,<sup>596</sup> that is, to suggest conversion, then Mary is the one whose life indicates the possibilities of a life converted to her son. Such a converted life is one lived in close and loving relationship. The closest relationship, expressed in terms of physical proximity, is one of inherence and adherence; typology that is strongly maternal. To inhere is only possible having first gained access. In the Eucharistic words of institution, Jesus opens the way to Himself by breaking open His body; His words evoking the foundational human trope of the mother whose body in birth is a metaphor of fracture. Fracture is what makes life possible.<sup>597</sup> The Johannine trope of Christic fracture at the Crucifixion scene is, in an inter-textual reading, registered in Mary who felt the force in her own soul. The symbol they share is expressive of their unity in suffering for the sake of others. To live such unity is to live as does a spousal couple, 'a subject in unity' (TOB 32:4); to act as a single organism of 'one flesh.'<sup>598</sup> The Christ corpus is pierced at the Cross in a metonymy of breakage, the broken Word penetrating Mary where it germinates in metaphoric reprise of the Annunciation. This

---

<sup>595</sup> Cf. Murray, "Poems and Poesies." Murray's description of the experience of art is strongly erotic.

<sup>596</sup> Steiner, 142.

<sup>597</sup> The theme of a sermon in Vance Havner, *Hearts Afire* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1952). The creation narrative in Genesis 2 also lends itself to this interpretation. The symbolic *breakage* of the male to form the female breaks the solitude of humankind. Generativity is henceforth possible; God's creative breakage reciprocally enriching male and female whose bodies can now be sexually gifted to each other.

<sup>598</sup> The expression of Genesis 2:24 indicates sexual union but has multiple other dimensions, including the ethical, sacramental and theological. Cf. TOB 9:5.

birth of the new covenant does not avoid the costliness of love but lives it as a labouring woman lives it: at the point where love in surrender to another becomes an act of sacrifice.

Edwin Muir has written that one of the chief concerns of a poet is to render truthful images: 'If the image is true, poetry fulfils its end.'<sup>599</sup> This end is achievable when a poet loses self-consciousness and self-concern by surrendering in humility to the words. This is the transcendent element in authentic composition, clarifying vision so that the writer will find him- or herself in the words, or be found by them. Such detachment from the ego allows an unsentimental critical faculty, with which an author can hone the work; exercising what Murray calls the 'calmly ruthless judgement.'<sup>600</sup> The authorial aim of self-surrender can be expressed by the metaphor of achieving nakedness.<sup>601</sup>

## 6.5 The poetry of the Mary poem

While historic artistic presentations of Mary have been shaped by concerns for carnal modesty, she can be viewed according to John Paul's category of 'original nakedness.' Following the Genesis accounts, the true, uncorrupted text of creation is that as it was in the beginning, as God does not revise His own Word. God, the complete utterance, risked creating a work of radical freedom, the human, in order that His image could freely choose to reply to His Word of love by becoming a creaturely word of love. Mary is the creature who returns that love unreservedly, no aspect of her life contradicting the originating Word, so she seeks no cover. Her person re-iterates the original psychic nakedness of man which the naked body had originally signified. Mary is the longed-for dialogue partner of the Father by virtue of realising the truth-content of personhood: being the image of God in a way which wholly corresponds with the original intention of the Creator.

Bruce Dawe has suggested that the task of a poem is not to make a judgement but to formulate questions (cf. 3.1.2, above). These questions are ordered towards finding truth and, perhaps,

---

<sup>599</sup> Edwin Muir, "The Public and the Poet," in *The Estate of Poetry: Essays by Edwin Muir* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1962), 108.

<sup>600</sup> Murray, "Embodiment and Incarnation," 324.

<sup>601</sup> Stephen Spender, *The Making of a Poem*, ed. S. O. Agrell and Georgina Mase (London: H. Hamilton, 1955), 59-60.

understanding. Mary offers such an image of truthfulness. Her status as poem of the Father is neither abstract nor spiritualised but full, so inclusive of her body. As figure of the Church, Mary is the one who dwells in Christ, who reciprocally dwells in her. As she is, though, the one mother of the one Son, Christ's indwelling of her is given unique expression. In human pregnancies, fetal cells enter the maternal blood circulation. Their presence persists in maternal blood and tissues for decades *post partum*, even from pregnancies not carried to term. Some of these transferred cells appear to have multi-lineage capability which may offer the mother assistance in case of injury to her body. This being so, the intimacy of Christ's presence within Mary is of a different order from the rest of the faithful. Jesus' presence is encoded in her blood. In words forcefully resonant of the Johannine Christ's, (John 14:9), it may be said that those who have seen her, have seen the Son.

Mary is chosen to be the mother of the Word as she lived the original life, standing unashamedly naked in her personal solitude before God; able to do so as she was oriented to God with whom she desired communion. This desire was met in her in extraordinary, poetic fashion. Her maternal body constitutes an act of faith in the words of God received, interpreted and preserved by her faith community. Her body is an affirmation and act of faith; that words matter, mean, and can be truth-bearing. Mary exemplifies such faith in the emissive Word of the Father, making it her own. She receives His dense utterance and allows it to infuse her whole person, making her its carrier and its realisation. Mary's motherhood sits at the juncture of transcendence (Mother of God) and immanence (Mother of the Church). Her maternal body offers nurturance and sustenance, protective hospitality and supportive strength. Mary becomes, by virtue of how she chooses to live her life, the incarnation of the poetry of the Father. Her body, portal of the Word's entry as matter into the material universe, remains the site of the Word's gestation, always and only delivering Jesus. This is her creative task. This is her life lived as poem of the Father.

## Appendix A: Annunciation Poems

### R.S. Thomas, 'The Annunciation by Veneziano'

The messenger is winged  
and the girl  
haloed a distance  
between them  
and between them and us  
down the long path the door  
through which he has not  
come  
on his lips what all women  
desire to hear  
in his hands the flowers that  
he has taken from her.

R. S. Thomas, *Collected Poems, 1945-1990* (London: Phoenix, 2000), 288.



**Edwin Muir, 'The Annunciation'**

The angel and the girl are met.  
Earth was the only meeting place.  
For the embodied never yet  
Travelled beyond the shore of space.  
The eternal spirits in freedom go.

See, they have come together, see,  
While the destroying minutes flow,  
Each reflects the other's face  
Till heaven in hers and earth in his  
Shine steady there. He's come to her  
From far beyond the farthest star,  
Feathered through time. Immediacy  
Of strangest strangeness is the bliss  
That from their limbs all movement takes.  
Yet the increasing rapture brings  
So great a wonder that it makes  
Each feather tremble on his wings.

Outside the window footsteps fall  
Into the ordinary day  
And with the sun along the wall  
Pursue their unreturning way.  
Sound's perpetual roundabout  
Rolls its numbered octaves out  
And hoarsely grinds its battered tune.

But through the endless afternoon  
These neither speak nor movement make,  
But stare into their deepening trance  
As if their gaze would never break.

Mick Imlah, ed., *Edwin Muir: Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 64.

**Elizabeth Jennings, 'The Annunciation'**

Nothing will ease the pain to come  
Though now she sits in ecstasy  
And lets it have its way with her.  
The angel's shadow in the room  
Is lightly lifted as if he  
Had never terrified her there.

The furniture again returns  
To its old simple state. She can  
Take comfort from the things she knows  
Though in her heart new loving burns  
Something she never gave to man  
Or god before, and this god grows

Most like a man. She wonders how  
To pray at all, what thanks to give  
And whom to give them to. 'Alone  
To all men's eyes I now must go'  
She thinks, 'And by myself must live  
With a strange child that is my own.'

So from her ecstasy she moves  
And turns to human things at last  
(Announcing angels set aside).  
It is a human child she loves  
Though a god stirs beneath her breast  
And great salvations grip her side.

Michael Schmidt, ed., *Elizabeth Jennings: New Collected Poems*  
(Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002), 31-2.

Noel Rowe, '*Magnificat*: 1. Annunciation'

The angel did not draw attention to himself.  
He came in. So quietly I could hear

My blood beating on the shore of absolute  
Beauty. There was fear, yes, but also

faith among familiar things:  
light, just letting go the wooden chair,

the breeze, at the doorway, waiting to come in  
where, at the table, I prepared a meal,

my knife cutting through the hard skin  
of vegetable, hitting wood, and the noise

outside of children playing with their dog,  
throwing him a bone. Then all these sounds

dropped out of hearing. The breeze  
drew back, let silence come in first,

and my heart, my heart, was wanting him,  
reaching out, and taking hold of smooth-muscled fire.

And it was done. I heard the children laugh  
and saw the dog catch the scarred bone.

Noel Rowe, *Next to Nothing*. Stray Dog Editions 14. (Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2004), 31.

## Bruce Dawe, 'Mary and the Angel'

for Helen Gould

When Mary had attained her fifteenth year  
she went with her parents (i.e. her mother)  
to see Dr Gabriel, the high-school gynaecologist,  
and sat reading *Spaceways* in his dove-grey waiting-room,  
until in the fullness of time she was called.

And Dr Gabriel rose from his desk and said,  
Well, aren't you the lucky girl to now have such  
an all-round future beautifully planned?

And when Mary looked up at his thoroughly professional  
face, his fluffy beard, the hands like wings,  
the diplomas on the wall and the portrait of his wife  
and children in a garden, she was troubled in herself  
and said, What is it  
makes you think I'm lucky?

And Dr Gabriel answered, Because you shall experience through tubal ligation  
an inconceivable joy which shall liberate your body  
from the bondage of your gender.

And Mary said to Gabriel, But what if later  
I should choose to take a partner?

And Dr Gabriel answered, Then you shall be given  
hormones to encourage  
superovulation,  
and a no-risk laparoscopy, and your ovum will be placed  
in a little petri dish for your spouse to fertilise.  
And we shall then evaluate the three healthy embryos  
for genetic abnormalities, to be frozen and then stored.  
And after the study, the travelling, the career,  
should you decide on  
the option of a baby, the embryo of your choice  
shall be transferred to you – or, should you prefer it,  
to a specified breeder woman...

And Mary sat there, her head dumbly bowed,  
and tried very hard  
to imagine happiness.

Bruce Dawe, *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954 to 2005*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Port Melbourne: Pearson Heinemann, 2006), 246-247.

## Appendix B: *Pietà* Poems

R. S. Thomas, '*Pietà*'

Always the same hills  
Crowd the horizon,  
Remote witnesses  
Of the still scene.

And in the foreground  
The tall Cross,  
Sombre, untenanted,  
Aches for the Body  
That is back in the cradle  
Of a maid's arms.

R. S. Thomas, *Collected Poems, 1945-1990* (London: Phoenix, 2000), 159.

**James McAuley, 'Pietà'**

A year ago you came  
Early into the light.  
You lived a day and night,  
Then died; no-one to blame.

Only once, with one hand,  
Your mother in farewell  
Touched you. I cannot tell,  
I cannot understand

A thing so dark and deep,  
So physical a loss:  
One touch, and that was all

She had of you to keep.  
Clean wounds, but terrible,  
Are those made with the Cross.

James McAuley, *Collected Poems 1936-1970* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971), 179.

**Les Murray, 'Pietà once attributed to Cosme Tura'**

This is the nadir of the story.

His mother's hairpiece, her *sheitel*,  
is torn away, her own cropped hair looks burnt.  
She has said the first Mass  
and made Godhead a fact  
which his strangeness kept proving,  
but what of that is still true  
now, with his limp weight at her knee?  
Her arms open, and withdraw,  
and come back. That first eucharist  
she could have been stoned to death for  
is still alive in her body.

Les Murray, *New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2003), 537.

**Tric O'Heare, 'Madonna of the Dry Country'**

This time  
they've put Mary in a 44-gallon drum  
hacked down the middle  
A tabernacle of galvanized ribs  
to hold her in

She tells herself she has perfect balance  
The world's a chipped beach ball  
still under her gripping marble feet  
Here in a backyard reclaimed from desert  
she crushes the snake without looking down

When the faithful come, she sees  
her ancient son hologrammed in their eyes  
One minute baby, the next a corpse  
and remembers the knowing brat  
with the future encoded in his blood

Every year has a shooting season  
when, tiring of ducks, men shoot at her  
because she is there and once was beautiful  
Their bullets have sheared away breasts,  
nose, lips, elbow, the arch of her neck

Pared back to a suggestion in the rock,  
she recites her own rosary  
and prays her son will truly come back  
to release her from a mantle  
that webs her arms to her sides

Often she dreams he has come back  
and is holding her in his torn and bloodied arms  
but when dawn comes, working dogs  
stretch awake and test their chains  
She knows simply the story's not yet done

Some days she just weeps  
People hurry down roads  
in plumes of dust  
to be sobered or cured  
by the sight of a mute woman crying

Touched by their simplicity  
she invokes her wayward son  
to do something  
Mary's thoughts are luminous  
but her tongue is tethered



## Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. "Kant and the Theology of Art." In *The Fourth Dimension of a Poem and Other Essays*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012.
- . "The Language and Methods of Humanism." In *The Fourth Dimension of a Poem*. New York, NY: Norton & Co., 2012.
- Alison, James. *Broken Hearts and New Creations: Intimations of a Great Reversal*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010.
- Anderson, Douglas. "Peirce on Metaphor." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 20, no. 4 (1984): 453-68.
- Atkinson, Joseph. "The Experience of the Body and the Divine: A Scriptural Perspective." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37, no. 2 (2010): 309-28.
- Austin, J. L., J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisa. *How to Do Things with Words : The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. The William James Lectures. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Barker, Margaret. "Atonement: The Rite of Healing." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49, no. 1 (1996): 1-20.
- . *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem*. London: SPCK, 1991.
- . *The Mother of the Lord*. Vol. 1, London; New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
- Barnard, Alan. *Genesis of Symbolic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Barthes, Roland. "Theory of the Text." In *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Beattie, Tina. *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate : A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation*. London ; New York: Continuum, 2002.
- . *Woman*. London: Continuum, 2003.
- Benedict XVI. *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*. Translated by Philip J. Whitmore. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
- Bergen, Benjamin K. *Louder Than Words : The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.
- Berry, Wendell. "Standing by Words." In *Standing by Words*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1983.
- Bickimer, David Arthur. *Christ the Placenta: Letters to My Mentor on Religious Education*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1983.
- Boss, Sarah Jane. "The Development of the Virgin's Cult in the High Middle Ages." In *Mary: The Complete Resource*, edited by Sarah Jane Boss, 149-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . "The Naked Madonna." *The Tablet*, 17 February 2001, 235.
- Boyarin, Daniel. "Jewish Masochism: Couvade, Castration and Rabbis in Pain." *American Imago* 51, no. 1 (1994): 3-36.
- Brady, Veronica. "Female Imagery and Imaging and the Experience of Theology." In *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, edited by Douglas A. Campbell. Studies in Theology and Sexuality, 124-33. London: SCM, 2003.
- Branham, Joan R. "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces: Menses and the Eucharist in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (2002): 15-22.
- Bray, Gerald. "Original Sin in Patristic Thought." *Churchman* 108, no. 1 (1994): 37-47.
- Bruzeliuss, Margaret. "Mother's Pain, Mother's Voice: Gabriela Mistral, Julia Kristeva, and the Mater Dolorosa." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18, no. 2 (1999): 215-33.
- Bulgakov, Sergius. *Relics and Miracles*. Translated by B. Jakin. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Bulzacchelli, Richard H. *Mary and the Acting Person: An Anthropology of Participatory Redemption in the Personalism of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II*. Dayton, OH: International Marian Research Institute, University of Dayton, 2012.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother : Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. London: University of California Press, 1984.
- Carpenter, Anne M. *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2015.
- Casad, Andrew. "Blood, Sex, and the Eucharist: A Discourse Analysis on the Reception of the Precious Blood." *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 313-21.
- Clarke, W. Norris. *The Philosophical Approach to God: A New Thomistic Perspective*. 2nd rev. ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Coakley, Sarah. "Creaturehood before God." *Theology* 93, no. 755 (1990): 343-54.
- . "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God." *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1 (2000): 61-73.
- . *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'on the Trinity'*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- . "Is There a Future for Gender and Theology? On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task." *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 85, no. 2 (2013).
- . *The New Asceticism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- . *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Challenges in Contemporary Theology. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
- . "Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction - Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of the Song." *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (2002): 431-43.
- Collins, Sally et al. *Oxford Handbook of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 with corrections.
- Cunneen, Sally *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol*. New York: Ballantine, 1996.
- Davies, Oliver. *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Davis, William V. *R. S. Thomas: Poetry and Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007.
- Dawe, Bruce. "Australian Poets in Profile 1." Special issue, *Southerly* 39, no. 3 (1979): 235-44.
- . *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954 to 2005*. 6th ed. Port Melbourne, VIC: Pearson Heinemann, 2008.
- de Lubac, Henri. *The Motherhood of the Church*. Translated by Sergia Englund. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982.
- DeLamater, John D., and Janet Shibley Hyde. "Essentialism Vs. Social Constructivism in the Study of Human Sexuality." *The Journal of Sex Research* 35, no. 1 (1998): 10-18.
- Dickenson, Donna. *Property in the Body: Feminist Perspectives*. Cambridge Law, Medicine, and Ethics. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Drury, John. *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and Their Meanings*. New Haven, CT ; London: Yale University Press in association with The National Gallery, London, 1999.
- Dunn, Rose Ellen. "Let It Be: Finding Grace with God through the *Gelassenheit* of the Annunciation." In *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, edited by Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller, 329-48. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- Echeverria, Eduardo J. "Once Again, John Paul II's *Fides Et Ratio*." *Philosophia Reformata* 69 (2004): 38-52.
- Evdokimov, Paul. "From the Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition." In *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology, 179-93. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Finch, Martha. "Rehabilitating Materiality: Bodies, Gods and Religion." *Religion* 42, no. 4 (2012): 625-31.
- Fingesten, Peter. "Topographical and Anatomical Aspects of the Gothic Cathedral." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 1 (1961): 3-23.
- Ford, David F. *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*. Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

- Fox, H. "Placentation in Intrauterine Growth Retardation." *Fetal and Maternal Medicine Review* 9, no. 2 (1997): 61-71.
- Fox, James. "The Riddle of Kate Moss." *Vanity Fair*, December 2012, 36-49 97-99.
- Freitag, Barbara. *Sheela-Na-Gigs: Unravelling an Enigma*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Gambero, Luigi. *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999.
- Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *Mary : Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*. Personalities of the New Testament. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.
- Geary, James. *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2012.
- Gentner, Dedre, and Brian Bowdle. "Metaphor as Structure-Mapping." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, edited by Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., 109–28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Gershoni, M., and S. Pietrokovski. "The Landscape of Sex-Differential Transcriptome and Its Consequent Selection in Human Adults." *BMC Biology* 15, no. 7 (2017).
- Glick, Leonard B. *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Goldstein, Valerie Saiving. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960): 100-12.
- Gousmett, Christopher John. "Shall the Body Strive and Not Be Crowned? Unitary and Instrumentalist Anthropological Models as Keys to Interpreting the Structure of Patristic Eschatology." PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1993.
- Granados, Jose. "The Body, the Family, and the Order of Love: The Interpretative Key to Vatican II." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 39, no. 1-2 (2012): 201-26.
- . "Embodied Light, Incarnate Image: The Mystery of Jesus' Transfiguration." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 2 (2008): 6-45.
- Green, Arthur. "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context." *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (2002): 1-52.
- Grygiel, Stanisław. *Discovering the Human Person : In Conversation with John Paul II*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014.
- Guite, Malcolm. *Faith, Hope and Poetry : Theology and the Poetic Imagination*. Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.
- Gupta, Nijay K. "Which Body Is a Temple (1 Cor.6:19)? Paul Beyond the Individual/Communal Divide." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2010): 520-36.
- Gurtler, Gary M. "Plotinus on the Limitation of Act of Potency." *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7, no. 1 (2009): 29-43.
- Gurtner, Daniel M. *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Gutmacher, A. E., Y. T. Maddox, and C. Y. Spong. "The Human Placenta Project: Placental Structure, Development, and Function in Real Time." *Placenta* 35, no. 5 (2014): 303-4.
- Haffner, Paul. *The Mystery of Mary*. Leominster, Chicago: Gracewing Liturgy Training Publications, 2004.
- Halloran, N. "The Flesh of the Church: De Lubac, Marion, and the Site of the Phenomenality of Givenness." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2010): 29-44.
- Hanvey, James. "Tradition as Subversion." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 1 (2004): 50-68.
- Harrison, Jennifer, and Kate Waterhouse, eds. *Motherlode: Australian Women's Poetry: 1986-2008*. Glebe, NSW: Puncher and Wattmann, 2009.
- Hart, David Bentley. "The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*." In *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, edited by Sarah Coakley. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

- Hart, Trevor. *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language and Literature*. Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013.
- Harvey, A. E. *Renewal through Suffering : A Study of 2 Corinthians*. Studies of the New Testament and Its World. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.
- Haverinen, Soili. "Trinity, Embodiment and Gender." *Ars Disputandi Supplement Series* (2013): 214-49. <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/294447>.
- Havner, Vance. *Hearts Afire*. Westwood, N.J.,: Revell, 1952.
- Hill, John Lawrence. *After the Natural Law: How the Classical Worldview Supports Our Modern Moral and Political Values*. San Fransisco: Ignatius Press, 2016.
- Horan, Daniel P. "Beyond Essentialism and Complementarity: Toward a Theological Anthropology Rooted in Haecceitas." *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 94-117.
- Horne, Donald. *The Lucky Country: Australia in the Sixties*. Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Books, 1964.
- Howell, Kenneth J. "Mary's Bodily Participation in the Redemption of Christ: the Johannine Witness." In *The Virgin Mary and the Theology of the Body*, edited by Donald H. Calloway, 189-215. Stockbridge MA: Marian Press, 2005.
- Humphreys, Colin J., and W. G. Waddington. "Astronomy and the Date of the Crucifixion." In *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, edited by Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi, 165-82. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter. New York: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Jakobson, Roman. "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics." In *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, 350-77. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1960. Reprint, 1964.
- James, Clive. *Poetry Notebook 2006-2014*. London: Picador, 2014.
- James, J. L., S. Srinivasan, M. Alexander, and L. W. Chamley. "Can We Fix It? Evaluating the Potential of Placental Stem Cells for the Treatment of Pregnancy Disorders." *Placenta* 35, no. 2 (2014): 77-84.
- Jay, Nancy B. *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Jennings, Elizabeth. *Every Changing Shape: Mystical Experience and the Making of Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996.
- . *New Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002.
- . "The Uses of Allegory: A Study of the Poetry of Edwin Muir." In *Every Changing Shape: Mystical Experience and the Making of Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996.
- Joel, Daphna. "Genetic-Gonadal-Genitals Sex (3g-Sex) and the Misconception of Brain and Gender, or, Why 3g-Males and 3g-Females Have Intersex Brain and Intersex Gender." *Biology of Sex Differences* 3, no. 1 (December 17 2012): 27.
- John Paul II. "Apostolic Journey to Ireland. Holy Mass in Phoenix Park." 1979. Homily. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790929\\_irlanda-dublino.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790929_irlanda-dublino.html).
- . "Celebration of the Unveiling of the Restorations of Michelangelo's Frescoes in the Sistine Chapel." 1994. Homily. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19940408\\_restauri-sistina.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19940408_restauri-sistina.html).
- . *Familiaris Consortio*: On the Role of the Christian Family. 1981. Apostolic Exhortation. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html).
- . *Fides Et Ratio*: On the Relation between Faith and Reason. 1998. Encyclical. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).
- . *Gratissimam Sane*: Letter to Families. 1994. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_02021994\\_families.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html).

- . "Letter to Artists." 1999. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html).
- . "Letter to Women." 1995. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_29061995\\_women.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html).
- . *Mulieris Dignitatem*: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women. 1988. Apostolic Letter. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html).
- . *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone. 1994. Apostolic Letter. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html).
- . *Redemptoris Mater*: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church. 1987. Encyclical. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031987\\_redemptoris-mater.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html).
- . "The Virginity of Mary, the truths of faith." 1996. General Audience. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1996/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19960710.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19960710.html).
- John Paul II. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Translated and edited by Michael Waldstein. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female." *Theological Studies* 45, no. 3 (1984): 25.
- . *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing, 1996.
- . *Truly Our Sister*. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- Jones, David. "Art and Sacrament." In *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, edited by Harman Grisewood, 143-79. London: Faber & Faber, 1959. First published 1955 by Weidenfeld & Nicholson.
- . "The Preface to 'The Anathemata'." In *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, edited by Harman Grisewood, 107-37. 1951. Reprint, London: Faber & Faber, 1959.
- Kelly, A. J. "Mary and the Creed: Icon of Trinitarian Love." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2004): 17-30.
- Kerr, Fergus. "The Need for Philosophy in Theology Today." *New Blackfriars* 65, no. 768 (1984): 248-60.
- Kitzberger, Ingrid R. "Stabat Mater? Re-Birth at the Foot of the Cross." *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3-4 (2003): 468-87.
- Kitzinger, Celia. "Intersexuality: Deconstructing the Sex/Gender Binary." *Feminism & Psychology* 9, no. 4 (1999): 493-98.
- Kraus, Helen. *Gender Issues in Ancient and Reformation Translations of Genesis 1-4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- . "Stabat Mater." In *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986.
- Kwok, Piu-lan. "Engendering Christ." In *The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women*, edited by Elizabeth A. Johnson, 255-69. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016.
- Lagrand, James. "How Was the Virgin Mary 'Like a Man'? A Note on Mt. 1:18b and Related Syriac Christian Texts." *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. fasc. 2 (1980): 97-107.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. 2nd ed. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Lavin, Marilyn Aronberg. "The 'Stella Altarpiece.' Magnum Opus of the Cesi Master." *Artibus et Historiae* 22, no. 44 (2001): 9-22.
- Leach, Edmund. *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1969.

- Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud Munus: On the Holy Spirit*. 1897. Encyclical. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_09051897\\_divinum-illud-munus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_09051897_divinum-illud-munus.html)
- Levin, David Michael. *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Lewis, C. S. "On Three Ways of Writing for Children." In *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1966. Reprint, 1982.
- . "Transposition." In *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, 91-115. New York: Harper Collins, 1962. Reprint, 2001.
- Leyerle, Blake. "Blood Is Seed." *The Journal of Religion* 81, no. 1 (2001): 26-48.
- Loughlin, Gerard. "Biblical Bodies." *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no. 1 (2005): 9-27.
- . "Desiring Bodies." *Cross Currents* 54, no. 4 (2005): 69-77.
- . "Myths, Signs and Significations." *Theology* 89, no. 730 (1986): 268-75.
- . "Nuptial Mysteries." In *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology in Honour of Fergus Kerr, OP*, edited by S. Oliver, K. Kilby and T. O'Loughlin, 173-92. London: T&T Clark, 2012.
- . "What Is Queer?: Theology after Identity." *Theology & Sexuality* 14, no. 2 (2008): 143-52.
- Lundell, Torborg. "Couvade in Sweden." *Scandinavian Studies* 71, no. 1 (1999): 93-104.
- Margalit, Natan. "Priestly Men and Invisible Women: Male Appropriation of the Feminine and the Exemption of Women from Positive Time-Bound Commandments." *Association for Jewish Studies* 28, no. 2 (2004): 297-316.
- Markus, R. A. "St Augustine on Signs." *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957): 60-83.
- Marshall, Graeme. "The Problem of Religious Language 'Look at It This Way' (Wittgenstein)\*." *Sophia* 51, no. 4 (2012).
- Martin, Francis. "Male and Female He Created Them: A Summary of the Teaching of Genesis Chapter One." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (1993): 240-65.
- Maxwell, Glyn. *On Poetry*. London: Oberon Books, 2012.
- McAuley, James. *Collected Poems: 1936-1970*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971.
- . *Poetry, Essays and Personal Commentary*. St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1988.
- McDonnell, Kilian. "Feminist Mariologies: Heteronomy/Subordination and the Scandal of Christology." *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (2005): 527-67.
- McFague, Sallie. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982.
- McGilchrist, Iain. "The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World." RSA Lecture, (November 17, 2010). <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/videos/2011/10/rsa-animate--the-divided-brain/rsa-lecture-iain-mcgilchrist-transcript.pdf>.
- McLauchlan, Richard. "R. S. Thomas: Poet of Holy Saturday." *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 6 (2011): 976-85.
- Miles, Margaret R. *Augustine on the Body*. Dissertation Series / American Academy of Religion. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979.
- . *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- . *A Complex Delight : The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750*. Berkeley, CA ; London: University of California Press, 2008.
- . "God's Love, Mother's Milk: An Image of Salvation." *Christian Century* 125, no. 2 (2008): 22-5.
- Miller, Sarah Alison. *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.
- Monti, Anthony. *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2003.
- Morgan, Barry. *Strangely Orthodox: R. S. Thomas and His Poetry of Faith*. Llandysul, Ceredigion: Gomer Press, 2006.

- Moss, David, and Lucy Gardner. "Difference--the Immaculate Concept? The Laws of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar." *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3 (1998): 377-401.
- Muir, Edwin. *An Autobiography*. 1954. Reprint, Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1993.
- . "The Natural Estate." In *The Estate of Poetry*, 1-22. 1962. Reprint, with new introduction, Saint Paul, MI: Graywolf Press, 1993.
- . "Poetry and the Poet." In *The Estate of Poetry*, 78-93. 1962. Reprint, with new introduction, Saint Paul, MI: Graywolf Press, 1993.
- . "The Public and the Poet." In *The Estate of Poetry*, 94-110. 1962. Reprint, with new introduction, Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1993.
- . *Selected Poems*. London: Faber & Faber, 2008.
- Murray, Les [A]. *The Biplane Houses : Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2006.
- . *New Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2003.
- . *Subhuman Redneck Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996.
- . "Embodiment and Incarnation." In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 309-25. 1986. Reprint, Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . "On Being Subject Matter." In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 30-44. 1983. Reprint, Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . "Poems and Poesies." In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 372-85. 1986; expanded 1987. Reprint, Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . "The Trade in Images." In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 344-50. Transcript of address delivered 1988. Potts Point NSW: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . *The Vernacular Republic: Poems 1961-1981*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982.
- Naumann, M. Isabell. "The Anthropology of Father Josseph Kenterich and the Image of Mary." In *The Virgin Mary and the Theology of the Body*, edited by Donald H. Calloway. Stockbridge, MA: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2005.
- Nelson, D. M. "Does a Picture of the Human Placenta Predict the Future?". *Placenta* 31, no. 11 (2010).
- Norman, Ralph V. "Jouissance, Generation and the Coming of God." *Theology & Sexuality* 14, no. 2 (2008): 153-80.
- Norris, Thomas. "Mariology a Key to the Faith." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1989): 193-205.
- O'Carroll, Michael. "Apparitions of Our Lady." In *Mary Is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, edited by William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock, 285-91. Leominster: Gracewing, 1997.
- . *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Wilmington, DE ; Dublin: Michael Glazier, Inc. ; Dominican Publications, 1982.
- Oesterle, John A. *Logic: The Art of Defining and Reasoning*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Ofrat, Gideon. *The Jewish Derrida*. Translated by Peretz Kidron. Library of Jewish Philosophy. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2001.
- Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." In *Why I Write*. 1946. Reprint, London: Penguin, 2004.
- Ory, Steven J., and Marcelo J. Barrionuevo. "The Differential Diagnosis of Female Infertility." In *Principles and Practice of Endocrinology and Metabolism*, edited by Kenneth L. Becker. Philadelphia, PA ; London: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2001.
- Pattison, Stephen. *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts*. London: SCM, 2007.
- Paul, Ian. "Metaphor and Exegesis." In *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Moller. Carlisle, CA and Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Publishing and Zondervan, 2001.
- Paulsell, Stephanie. *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*. The Practices of Faith Series. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

- Pechey, Graham. "'Frost at Midnight' and the Poetry of Periphrasis." *Cambridge Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2012): 229-44.
- Perez-Gil, Maria Mar. "Mary and the Carnal Maternal Genealogy: Towards a Mariology of the Body." *Literature and Theology* 25, no. 3 (2011): 297-311.
- Pfeffer, Naomi. "Older Mothers and Global/National Responsibilities." *BioNews*, no. 544. Published electronically 8 February 2010. [http://www.bionews.org.uk/page\\_53936.asp](http://www.bionews.org.uk/page_53936.asp).
- Pickstock, Catherine. "Matter and Mattering: The Metaphysics of Rowan Williams." *Modern Theology* 31, no. 4 (2015): 599-617.
- Pius XII. *Sacra Virginitas: On Consecrated Virginity*. 1954. Encyclical. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_25031954\\_sacra-virginitas.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25031954_sacra-virginitas.html)
- Prokes, Mary Timothy. "The Nuptial Meaning of the Body in Light of Mary's Assumption." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 11, no. 2 (1984): 157-76.
- Pybus, Cassandra. *The Devil and James McAuley*. 2nd ed. St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2001.
- Quash, Ben. "Hans Urs Von Balthasar's 'Theatre of the World': The Aesthetic of a Dramatics." Chap. 2 In *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar*, edited by Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor. Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts, 19-31. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008.
- Rahner, Karl. *Faith and Ministry*. Translated by Edward Quinn. Theological Investigations. Vol. 29, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984.
- . *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Translated by David John Bourke. Theological Investigations. Vol. 8, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971.
- . *More Recent Writings*. Translated by Kevin Smyth. Theological Investigations. Vol. 4, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966.
- . *Science and Christian Faith*. Translated by Hugh M. Riley. Theological Investigations. Vol. 21, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988.
- . *Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Translated by Karl H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger. Theological Investigations. Vol. 3, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*. Translated by Adrian Walker. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.
- Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*. Translated by John M. McDermott. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983.
- . Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World. 2004. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040731\\_collaboration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html).
- Reece, E. Albert, and J. C. Hobbins. *Clinical Obstetrics: The Fetus and the Mother*. 3rd ed.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
- Retief, F. P., and L. Cilliers. "Christ's Crucifixion as Medico-Historical Event." *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7, 26, no. 2 (2006): 294-309.
- Riches, Aaron. "Deconstructing the Linearity of Grace: The Risk and Reflexive Paradox of Mary's Immaculate Fiat." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (2008): 179-94.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics." Translated by David Pellauer. In *Hermeneutics: Writings and Lectures, Volume 2*, edited by Daniel Frey and Nicola Strickler, 45-64. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- . "The Problem of Hermeneutics." Translated by David Pellauer. In *Hermeneutics: Writings and Lectures, Volume 2*, edited by Daniel Frey and Nicola Strickler, 1-44. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- . *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- . "Speaking and Writing." In *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 25-44. Fort Worth, TX: TCU Press, 1976.



- Rogers, Eugene F., Jr. "Bodies Demand Language: Thomas Aquinas." In *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin, 176-87. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.
- . "How the Virtues of an Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas." *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 1 (1996): 64-81.
- . "The Liturgical Body." *Modern Theology* 16, no. 3 (2000): 365-76.
- . "The Narrative of Natural Law in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans 1." *Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (1998): 254-76.
- . *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*. Challenges in Contemporary Theology. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999.
- . "Supplementing Barth on Jews and Gender: Identifying God by Anagogy and the Spirit." *Modern Theology* 14, no. 1 (1998): 43-81.
- . "Thomas and Barth in Convergence on Romans 1." *Modern Theology* 12, no. 1 (1996): 57-84.
- Rose, Michael S. "Church Restoration and the Third Millennium." *Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture* 3, no. 1 (2000): 17-20.
- Rosen, Aaron. *Art & Religion in the 21st Century*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2015.
- Rowe, Noel. "James McAuley: The Possibility of Despair." *Southerly* 60, no. 2 (2000): 26-38.
- . *Next to Nothing*. Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2004.
- . "'Will This Be Your Poem, or Mine?' The Give and Take of Story." In *Ethical Investigations: Essays on Australian Literature and Poetics*, edited by B Brennan, 13-29. Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2008.
- . *Wings and Fire*. Hunters Hill: Marist Promotions Team, 1984.
- Rubin, Miri. *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*. London: Penguin Books, 2009.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*. London: SCM, 1983.
- Rutt, Richard. "Why Should He Send His Mother? Some Theological Reflections on Marian Apparitions." In *Mary Is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumensim*, edited by William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock, 274-84. Leominster: Gracewing, 1997.
- Savage, Deborah. "The Centrality of Lived Experience in Wojtyla's Account of the Person." *Annals of Philosophy* 61, no. 4 (2013): 19-51.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Schiller, Britt-Marie. "Representing Female Desire within a Labial Framework of Sexuality." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 60 (2012): 1161-97.
- Schindler, David L. "Being, Gift, Self-Gift: A Reply to Waldstein on Relationality and John Paul II's Theology of the Body (Part One)." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 42 (2015): 221-51.
- Scola, Angelo. "The Nuptial Mystery at the Heart of the Church." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 4 (1998): 630-62.
- Sell, Nancy A. "The Magnificat as a Model for Ministry: Proclaiming Justice, Shifting Paradigms, Transforming Lives." *Liturgical Ministry* 10, no. 31-40 (2001).
- Sered, Susan Starr. *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Sewell, Elizabeth. *The Human Metaphor*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1964.
- . "The Reading of Signs, in Thinking and Poetry." In *To Be a True Poem: Essays by Elizabeth Sewell*, edited by William E. Ray, 153-67. Nth Carolina: Hunter Publishing Co., 1979.
- Shivanandan, Mary. "Body Narratives: Language of Truth?" *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3, no. 3 (2000): 166-93.
- Soskice, Janet Martin. "Blood and Defilement." In *Feminism and Theology*, edited by Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, 333-43. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985.
- . "Monica's Tears: Augustine on Words and Speech." *New Blackfriars* 83, no. 980 (2002): 448-58.

- . "Trinity and Feminism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, edited by Susan Frank Parsons, 135-50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Spender, Stephen. *The Making of a Poem*. Edited by S. O. Agrell and Georgina Mase London: H. Hamilton, 1955.
- Stadlen, Naomi. *What Mothers Do : Especially When It Looks Like Nothing*. London: Piatkus, 2004.
- Steinberg, Leo. *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*. 2nd, revised and expanded ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 1983.
- Steiner, George. *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* London: Faber & Faber, 1989.
- Storkey, Elaine. "Who Is the Christ? Issues in Christology and Feminist Theology." In *The Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, edited by Douglas A. Campbell. Studies in Theology and Sexuality, 105-23. London: T&T Clark.
- Strhan, Anna. "Religious Language as Poetry: Heidegger's Challenge." *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 926-38.
- Sutton, Agneta. "The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and John Paul II." *New Blackfriars* 87, no. 1010 (2006): 418-33.
- Sylva, Dennis D. "The Temple Curtain and Jesus' Death in the Gospel of Luke." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (1986): 239-50.
- Tatman, Lucy. "Blasphemous Thoughts." *Theology & Sexuality* 11, no. 1 (2004): 64-71.
- . *Knowledge That Matters: A Feminist Theological Paradigm and Epistemology*. Studies in Theology and Sexuality 6. London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.
- Thomas, M. Wynn. *R. S. Thomas: Serial Obsessive*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013.
- Thomas, R. S. *Collected Poems: 1945-1990*. London: Phoenix, 2000.
- Ticciati, Susannah. *Job and the Disruption of Identity. Reading Beyond Barth*. London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2005.
- . *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs*. Studies in Systematic Theology. Leiden [Netherlands]: Brill, 2013.
- Tillard, Jean-Marie R. "The Marian Issues." In *Studying Mary: Reflections on the Virgin Mary in Anglican and Roman Catholic Theology and Devotion*, edited by Adelbert Denaux and Nicholas Sagovsky. London: T&T Clark, 2007.
- Tonstad, Linn Marie. "Sexual Difference and Trinitarian Death: Cross, Kenosis, and Hierarchy in the *Theo-Drama*." *Modern Theology* 26, no. 4 (2010): 603-31.
- Turner, Denys. *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- . *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Valenza, Gaetano, Luca Citi, and et al. "Revealing Real-Time Emotional Responses: A Personalized Assessment Based on Heartbeat Dynamics." *Scientific Reports* 4 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep04998>.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the 'Miracle' of Understanding." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 1 (2005): 5-37.
- . "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of Covenant." In *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*. Scripture and Hermeneutics, 1-49. Carlisle, CMA; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Publishing; Zondervan, 2001.
- Waldstein, Michael. Introduction and index to *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, by John Paul II, 1-128; 677-730. Translated and edited by Michael Waldstein. Boston MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006.
- Wallace, David Foster. "The Empty Plenum: David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*." In *Both Flesh and Not: Essays*, 73-116. London: Penguin Books, 2013.
- Ward, Graham. "The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ." In *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader*, edited by Bjorn Krondorfer, 98-112. London: SCM Press, 2009.
- Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. 1976. Reprint, New York: Vintage, 1983.
- Warner, Martin. *Say Yes to God: Mary and the Revealing of the Word Made Flesh*. London: Tufton Books, 1999.

- Willemien, Otten. "Christ's Birth of a Virgin Who Became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*." *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 3 (1997): 247-60.
- Williams, Rowan. *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.
- . *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*. London: Continuum, 2005.
- . "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's '*De Doctrina*'." *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (1989): 138-50.
- . "On Being a Human Body." *Sewanee Theological Review* 42, no. 4 (1999): 403-13.
- . *On Christian Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000.
- . *A Ray of Darkness*. Lanham, MD ; Plymouth, UK: Cowley Publications, 1995.
- . "The Seal of Orthodoxy: Mary and the Heart of Christian Doctrine." In *Say Yes to God: Mary and the Revealing of the Word Made Flesh*, edited by Martin Warner. London: Tufton Books, 1999.
- . *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*. Norwich: Canterbury, 2007.
- Wojtyla, Karol. *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by H. T. Willetts. Revised English ed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981.
- . *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Revised ed. in collaboration with Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. 10. Dordrecht; Boston; London: D. Reidel Publishing, 1979.